Women's experiences of homeless services
one city in time

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Award date:
2021

Awarding institution:
Coventry University

Women's Experiences of Homeless Services:

One City in Time

By

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September 2019

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the University's requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Certificate of Ethical Approval

Applicant:	Linda Mann
Project Title:	PhD research: Womens experiences of homeless services

This is to certify that the above named applicant has completed the Coventry University Ethical Approval process and their project has been confirmed and approved as Medium Risk

Date of approval:	06 Aug 2013
Project Reference Number:	P12659

Certificate of Ethical Approval

Applicant:	Linda Mann
Project Title:	'Women's Experiences of Homeless Services: a case study of one city in England'

This is to certify that the above named applicant has completed the Coventry University Ethical Approval process and their project has been confirmed and approved as Medium Risk

Date of approval:	26 Jun 2014
Project Reference Number:	P22101

Abstract

Academic research focuses on a narrow sector of female homelessness such as domestic violence, identity or health, at the expense of that which questions women's experience of homelessness services. This thesis addresses that gap, building a holistic picture of women's experiences of homelessness and their needs in exiting homelessness. It offers in-depth insights into the experiences of single adult women using homeless services, and the views and experiences of professionals working within those services. These insights not only contribute new knowledge, they also draw attention to the disparity of views that exist, and the challenges this creates in providing appropriate services. The thesis employs an innovative mix of creative methods and semi-structured interviews, building narratives of eight 'single' adult women exploring their experiences of the services they use. Integrated reflections of my positionality and journey as a practitioner-researcher are also provided.

Research finds a delay for women receiving support once they become homeless. One factor is the way that homelessness is defined by women. It differs to the professional's definition and impacts women's ability to access timely support. Linked to the way in which women identify themselves, and are identified within society, this delay led to women receiving homeless support being frequently excluded. Findings also revealed very little recognition for the women as mothers, questioning the identification of them by professionals as 'single'.

Women were overlooked in service design and methods of delivery. Although practitioners recognised that women's homeless experiences were different to those of the men they worked with, they did not offer alternatives. This leads` to women's priorities being neglected and the potential for the revolving door of homelessness to continue. It shows that relationships with services and the professionals working in them are imperative to women accessing, using and successfully navigating support. Relationships are revealed to be central to women's overall homeless experiences; negative relationships and relationship breakdown being key factors in becoming homeless.

The timing of the research allowed scrutiny on the changes to the welfare system and structural systems, emphasising that they not only exacerbate pressures and complexities of single homeless women's experiences of services but also challenge the services ability to work with and include all single homeless women. Although a lack of concern was voiced by participants, linked to the 'poverty of expectations', the research found that reduced income negatively

impacted upon them, maintaining their homelessness and their inability to exit dangerous situations to avoid homelessness. This impact was particularly recognised by the services working with women; yet lacking within policy and legislation. The thesis concludes that gender has important implications for professionals working with homeless women and for UK homeless policy.

Acknowledgements

I would firstly like to thank the women that contributed towards this study; for their time and willingness to share their stories so candidly and without whom this thesis would not be possible. I hope they feel that the end result makes their experiences with research worthwhile. My appreciation is also sent to the professionals working with them who enabled me to access services, women and contextualise the experiences of single homeless women living in the City at that time.

I would also like to thank my Director of Studies, Dr Geraldine Brady and my supervisory team Dr Anne Coufopoulos and Professor Nigel Berkeley for all the support, guidance, encouragement and constructive criticism they have given me throughout this PhD journey all of which has been invaluable to me.

Finally I would like to thank my husband, Michael and my two precious boys for supporting me throughout and experiencing the ups and downs with me. Thank you for being willing to share me.

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Statutory homelessness – refers to homeless individuals and households whom the local authority have a duty to house, either because they are intentionally homeless (see below) or because they fit within a priority need category (see below).

Unintentionally homeless - refers to the fact that the applicant has been able to prove they are not homeless through any fault of their own, intentional homelessness is when it is deemed homelessness could have been avoided by the individual – for example they have ran up rent arrears and been evicted.

Priority need - 'priority need' refers to pregnant woman or those with dependent children, those vulnerable as a result of old age, mental illness or handicap or physical disability or other special reason. Those homeless or threatened with homelessness as a result of an emergency such as flood, fire or other disaster or any person aged 16 and 17 years old, aged under 21 years old who were in local authority care between the ages of 16 and 18, aged 21 and over who are vulnerable as a result of leaving local authority care, vulnerable as a result of leaving the armed forces, vulnerable as a result of leaving prison, fleeing domestic violence or the threat of domestic violence.

Single homeless woman – For the purpose of this research 'single homeless women' will be classified as such if they have no dependants or do not have care of them at the time of the interview, if they are not accommodated with a partner/looking to be accommodated with a partner and are accessing the service as a single female. All women in the study on which this thesis reports are adults and aged over 18 years.

Chapter 1: Introduction

'Everyone has the right to…housing' is written in Article 25 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. However an estimated 150 million people are expected to be homeless worldwide (Chamie, 2017). An analysis conducted by Shelter found that 320,000 people were homeless in England at the end of 2018 (Shelter, 2018). The aim of the research on which this thesis` is based is to contribute evidence to inform future research and increase knowledge on homeless women.

1.1 Gaps in Research

Homelessness has been the subject of much research and interest from academics, policy makers and charities alike. Stories of homeless families and individuals are frequently told through mass media imploring support and compassion from the general public. Yet despite this there are still many areas about which there is a relative dearth of research. Female homelessness, and specifically their use of services, is one of those areas. 'Most research about homelessness is not explicitly gendered, but is inadvertently dominated by the experiences and views of homeless men' (Crisis, accessed May 2013). This thesis is explicitly gendered and will focus solely on the experiences of women. It will offer no comparison to the experiences of men, instead it begins from a stance of acknowledgement that the reasons for women's homelessness are complex and that there are additional circumstances differing from single men's homelessness. It therefore accepts women's needs and routes out of homelessness would also be different.

Much previous research has highlighted the gaps in knowledge regarding gender and women's homelessness (Jones, 1999, May et al 2007, Bowpitt and McNeill, 2008, Reeve, 2017). In 2012 the Women's Homelessness in Europe Network (WHEN) was established in an effort to focus attention on the issue and increase the prevalence of research and knowledge surrounding women who are homeless. In 2016 'Women's Homelessness in Europe' was written by Paula Mayock and Joanne Bretherton; a review of the book described both the book and the network as 'a response to the pitiful state of academic and policy knowledge about women's homelessness, the resultant ungendered approach to understanding and responding to homelessness, and the ramifications for women's housing situations and experiences' (Reeve, 2017). An investigation into how single women experience homeless services builds on the response, supporting the idea of filling the gaps in knowledge surrounding female

homelessness and reducing the 'theoretical poverty' at the centre of homelessness research (36: Neale, 1997).

1.2 Research aims

The aim of this thesis is to examine 'Women's Experiences of Homeless Services' with a view to inform about what single women want from these services and how in tough economic times they can still be effective. Previous research within the homeless population and service provision has shown the importance of making service user views known 'so that ways of addressing any gaps in service provision can be considered' (Reid and Klee, 1999).

Overall the research on which this thesis is based uses narrative methodology to capture the experiences, beliefs and needs of single homeless women living in one city during a crucial period of time. It will provide unique knowledge of individuals lived experiences of homeless services and build a holistic picture of their needs in exiting homelessness as well as 'concentrat[ing] on practical and realistic solutions' (Kidd, 2012).

The research aimed to identify effective support methods and solutions that could be used to make a difference for them and their peers. The number of academic studies asking about women's experiences of homelessness has increased over the past ten years, however many are targeted toward those women experiencing domestic violence or those with dependants and not focused on the services that they use. This research upon which this thesis is based bridges that gap.

Underpinning the research are the following three questions:

1. How do single homeless women experience homeless services?
2. What is the influence of gender on service design and delivery?
3. How do current and planned political and structural changes effect women's homelessness and services supporting homeless women?

Although the thesis does not explicitly consider the issue of gender difference, Chapter 2 highlights research that has found women and men experience homelessness differently. Yet despite this, many services offered are to both men and women and do not differ in their

content. Academic research has often focused on narrow sectors of female homelessness such as domestic violence, identity or health, all of which are important, but without understanding the distinctive circumstances of all homeless women we will fail 'to develop appropriate responses and prevent homelessness amongst women' (Reeve et al, 2006).

The first question explores how women use homeless services, why and how they do so, when during their homeless journey they access them and the impact this had at that point of their lives. Services are central to the solution to homelessness, by investigating the experiences, beliefs and needs of women this thesis identifies affective support methods and solutions that could be used to make a difference for them and their peers. There is a dearth of research that questions women's use and experience of homeless services, often information that is provided is part of a larger inquiry into women's homelessness, perhaps negating their influential position in changing the trajectory of many of these women's lives. What is more, these wider studies use more general recording to portray women's experiences, losing the order and way in which services are used and assumed to be needed by the women themselves. Studies that focus on street homelessness for example completely miss altogether the ways in which women survive homelessness (6: Bowpitt and McNeill, 2008). The research on which this thesis is based helps to build a holistic picture of women's experiences of homelessness, as well as specifically their use of services and their needs in exiting homelessness, whilst helping to bridge the gap in knowledge identified by seeking to understand how services play a part in supporting homeless women and ensuring that women's views are exposed.

Considering the gender differences, for services to work they must be able to support men and women differently. The second question aims to determine whether and how this is being achieved. In 2007 the report 'Improving Services for homeless women' was produced by Crisis specifying that there was a need to move away from a 'one service suits all' ideology and generally recognise women's needs and that a service for ALL women is needed – one that does not limit itself to addressing a specific need. Recent research found that services are still not fully equipped to work with homeless women with some homelessness services unable to manage the complexity of problems often faced by homeless women due to the frequent histories of trauma and abuse (Homeless Link, 2017) and only 11 per cent of accommodation projects are able to offer women only provision within their service (Homeless Link, 2016). There is however insufficient further research on how gender influences the design of

homeless services. This thesis raises the profile of homeless single women and addresses the gap in knowledge, posing whether gender should influence services. It will question how women feel their needs can and should be met and whether gender is considered in designing and delivering homeless services used to support this population.

In addition to services the societal pressures facing women and services are important in shaping their homelessness journey. When the research on which thesis is based began the Welfare Reform Act of 2012 had recently been introduced and not all of its changes had yet been implemented. Along with other political and structural changes England was facing the largest welfare reform for over forty years. There has been much debate and support surrounding the view that the Welfare Reform Act and austerity measures leading to reductions in funding were impacting more negatively on those already struggling financially, as they were more reliant on state benefits and support services. Fitzpatrick et al (2011) states 'it is…extremely worrying that the Coalition Government's radical reform of the welfare and housing safety nets look set to weaken the very systems that have traditionally provided a 'buffer' between vulnerable households and homelessness', question three of the research aims addresses how much these changes affected the women included in this study. The homeless, already marginalised in society, are well within those 'struggling financially' and as shown in Chapter 2 so are women. It was clear then before the research began that homeless women were likely to be affected. Due to how recent the changes were little was known about how single homeless women may be impacted, both by the changes in welfare and the reduction in services. This thesis is a timely explanation of some of these affects and provides knowledge on the pressures facing both homeless women and services from a service user and professional working within homeless services perspective. Furthermore it considers how services could better support the women that access them and provides recommendations for services relevant to contemporary socio-economic conditions.

1.3 Defining homelessness for the purpose of this research

Chapter 2 gives a thorough account of the challenge for academics in finding an agreed definition for homelessness. Here a brief introduction is given for the definition being used within this thesis. For the purposes of this inquiry the wider definition that a person is homeless if they have no access to accommodation of their own that they can legally and/or safely occupy was used; again a more detailed explanation of this term is given in Chapter 2. The decision to maintain such a broad definition rather than continue to follow statutory

definitions was made so that women who may be homeless but not offered a 'homeless duty', a homeless duty means there is an obligation by local authorities to rehouse or support, were not excluded. Statutory homelessness is described by Wendy Wilson as 'those households for whom local authorities, after receiving an application, have a duty to secure accommodation because they are unintentionally homeless and in a priority need category.' *(SN/SP/1164).* Wilson goes on to affirm that 'Local authorities do not have a duty to secure accommodation for all homeless people'. For example, single people and couples without children who are not deemed to be vulnerable for some reason (e.g. as a result of their age or physical/mental ill health) are not owed a 'full housing duty.' Or are found to be either not homeless or 'non-statutory' homeless. *(SN/SP/1164)*

From my previous experience as a homeless practitioner (to be addressed further in this introduction) I was aware that many individuals using homeless services had been found 'non-statutorily' homeless due to 'intentional homelessness' or other reason. Without a wider definition therefore many women would be discounted. The wider definition also allows inclusion of the figures and statistics used by local authority services as well as other organisations working with the homeless in the UK, not all of whom use the 'statutory homeless' definition.

On addressing female homelessness other considerations needed to be made. There is a vast difference in the way women with children and those living without are addressed by housing legislation, obviously a household containing children is deemed a priority. A woman on her own without children is granted the same priority as a man without children, in that being homeless alone does not make them a priority. There is also a difference in how a person on their own is considered within legislation in comparison to someone who is in a couple. For the purpose of this thesis 'single homeless women' will be classified as such if they have no dependants or do not have care of them at the time of the interview, if they are not accommodated with a partner/looking to be accommodated with a partner and would be accessing a service as a single female.

For the same reason of definitions within legislation, and therefore ensuring all women included had the same legal entitlements, adult females only were included in this research. Although this in itself presented some complications. An adult by law is considered someone

over the age of 18. At this point the state has no 'duty of care' for the individual and therefore their 'homeless duty' is reduced. Before the age of 18 the duty would lie with social care services who would assist a young person in obtaining and maintaining accommodation. However there are caveats to this, for example care leavers can be supported up until the age of 21. Also women who are fleeing domestic abuse should also automatically receive a homeless duty under different criteria, because of this women were not actively recruited in refuges. A further complication was the recent change (part of those mentioned above) to individuals housing benefit entitlement under the age of 35. The amount under 35's were entitled to claim was reduced to the equivalent of the rate of a room in a shared house under changes to the benefit system. However, this only effected the amount they received and not whether they received it and therefore women participants over the age of 18 and under 35 were able to participate.

1.4 Context of the research

Due to its importance I wanted to explain in this introduction a little about the timing of the research on which this thesis is based. It took place in a time of huge welfare reform within the country. The national reform directed great changes in the way local authorities were funding services within housing and social care. Within the city in which the research was based this meant that the commissioning of homeless services had recently been radically overhauled. Services that had previously been independently commissioned to provide their own unique service; single adult (18+) male hostel accommodation, floating support for adult offenders and homeless families support for example, were now being brought together under one new tender. The new contract was providing services for adults aged over 25 who could be included under these headings: complex needs, offenders, single homeless, families, couples and rough sleepers. The services provided for these groups would be both accommodation and floating support services. What this meant then, was that rather than several different organisations with different ethos' and working methods, the majority of services for the women I wanted to include within this study would be overseen by one organisation. The local authority saw this as a way to streamline its service provision and theoretically it should simplify service access and maintain standards.

Two major points are that the age group had risen from 18 to 25 for single adult provision in the city and that women were not specifically mentioned in the tender in terms of how much

provision should be directed towards them under the new system; although there was an expectation that they would be provided for with women's homelessness being one of the key 'issues' the local authority wanted the winner of the contract to combat.

The organisation that won the contract sub-contracted some of the services to existing providers with changes to the age of recipients, funding and reporting key in the new structure. One major provider at this time that participated in the mapping study and that the women spoke of refused to tender under this new structure and therefore lost its contract and its work was scaled back significantly. Others won new work they had not previously been responsible for. Timing is particularly imperative to this study due to the impact the restructure had on single adult homeless women. At the time of conducting the research it was clear that more services were recently available to women than there had been before. In the years prior to this research there were approximately sixteen beds set aside specifically for single homeless women aged over 18. In theory the changes to the way services were being delivered meant that provision had therefore expanded with a new 80+ bed hostel offering beds for women, men and couples aged over 25. Within this new structure the service previously offering the sixteen beds was no longer funded and therefore this accommodation was lost but within the new hostel there was no upper limit to how many of these beds could be for women. This potentially created an environment in which ALL registered single homeless women could be housed as the amount of short term supported accommodation available had increased dramatically. However, as this thesis will show this was not the case as in reality the same hostel ring fenced a five bedroom wing only to women.

Furthermore, for under 25's there was in real terms a reduction in beds, with options now limited to a pre-existing 60+ bed hostel which had become the main hub offering accommodation. Preference within this hub was given to those aged 16-18 who were also housed here and to whom the council automatically had a duty of care. The idea behind this was to move young people out of hostels, however it left a huge deficit for young people aged 18-24 and in real terms they faced using charities and friends and family until they could be more sustainably housed in local authority housing.

1.5 Research establishment

Reflection is a theme that can be found throughout this thesis, not only in the experiences of the women but also for me as the researcher. As a feminist researcher it was important that I acknowledged my position within the research to ensure that the rigour of the research was not undermined; 'being reflexive and providing these reflections for public scrutiny is often considered a key element of ethical, rigorous qualitative research' (Bishop and Shepherd, 2011: 1283).

It was clear early on in the research that any data that I collected – whether through reviewing the literature or in speaking to services and single homeless women – could not be viewed by me objectively. My own experience of working within homelessness, as a woman and in living in the city in which the research is based all meant that data would be analysed from this perspective and any findings would be impacted by my own views, even where I tried to mitigate this. The research design was influenced by my previous work as a practitioner, the data was analysed after I had built relationships with the women and as I immersed myself in the women's narratives. As David Morgan (1998) explains, when we are writing about another and sharing their stories, although the focus is on the individual, the results are 'never purely individual', and we cannot truly separate our personal and our academic (or indeed professional) selves; whilst completing research 'distinctions between the public and the private or between the scholarly and the personal become blurred if not entirely obliterated' (p657). For the reader to truly understand this thesis I knew they would need to better understand me and the context of its data collection and analysis.

Furthermore, I wanted the reader to understand the journey I travelled from practitioner to researcher in order to fully appreciate my role in the research process. At the beginning, I was concerned about how I could exclude myself believing that my history as a practitioner and my role as a researcher 'should' be kept separate, what would I do if I thought I could help? My supervisory team and a better understanding of research helped me to see that it would be unethical not to (Ellis, C, 1999).

To achieve this I use the device of text boxes which appear throughout the thesis providing reflexive accounts which help to explain my experiences of that particular phase of the research. In addition, section 3.3.3.3 includes extracts from a recently accepted chapter

‘Relational doctoral supervision: practitioner/researcher, insider/outsider and the value of reflexivity’ which has been co-authored with my Director of Studies Dr Geraldine Brady and will appear in a soon to be published book about PhD supervision. This approach was chosen so that the focus of the thesis could remain on the women who participated in the research, rather than on me as a researcher, whilst my position within it remains transparent to the reader. The first of these textboxes can be found next in this section and explains how the research on which this thesis is based was established and locates my position. The importance of this reflexive nature within the research is discussed further in Chapter 3.

My personal journey with this research began 13 years ago when I first began working with young offenders at risk of homelessness upon release from incarceration. It was here that I first witnessed and felt the impact of homelessness on an individual's future and it was here that I first began to ask questions about what was being done to improve people's opportunities for exiting homelessness.

Since then I have worked as a homeless practitioner in varying establishments both in the voluntary and statutory sector within paid and unpaid positions. Throughout this time the questions I had about what led to homelessness or how homelessness affected individuals seemed to be answered through the life stories presented by the boys and girls and men and women I supported. The bigger question seemed to me that I knew of many people, organisations and charities supporting these individuals, I was one of them, and yet homelessness continued to effect so many, why? My only conclusion could be that there must be something we were missing. It was my desire to help people exit homelessness and to find security, stability and safety. The realisation that I was lacking the fundamental knowledge and understanding required to do this ensured I paid attention to any opportunity to learn.

I was therefore drawn to the field of research to try and develop a deeper understanding of individuals over a longer period of their journey. How people experience support and whether this impacted on their experience of homelessness seemed crucial in knowing how to reduce homelessness and possibly prevent it, and as a woman I particularly wanted to answer, how do women experience homeless services and what do they need from them?

Given my passion for the subject it was perhaps predictable and anticipated that my research journey would be an emotional one and throughout the completion of the research on which this thesis is based I experienced many different emotions to the different stages. The initial literature review left me feeling saddened and frustrated at the limited attention given to homeless women and that they had spent so many years being ignored. It made me question my role as a practitioner – how had I not realised the gravity of the situation? It left me more determined to support those already working for change.

The prospect of beginning my field research both excited and terrified me – this is what I wanted to do, and I couldn't wait to get talking to *real* people, the people I had centred my research around. I had spent my career working with professionals in homeless services and talking to vulnerable and homeless people but knowing I would be working as a researcher, left me feeling out of my depth. Thoughts such as 'what if I'm a terrible interviewer?', 'what if people don't take me seriously in this role?', 'what if it shows that I don't really know what I'm doing?' would recurrently enter my head and made it difficult for me to accept myself as a researcher.

Recruiting participants and navigating the ethical considerations during the data collection process whilst also facing my own personal ups and downs of marriage, miscarriage, bereavement, redundancy, pregnancy, motherhood and changes to my academic structures and support left me at times feeling distracted, frustrated and downright knackered some days to elated, satisfied and full of hope on others. When it came to analysing the data and writing my thesis I often felt bored as much as I did excited, nervous about the future and frequently left asking more questions than I had answers.

I had enjoyed working with the homeless population and despite, or maybe because of, the range of emotions I experienced in my research journey I enjoyed interviewing homeless women. The transcripts show laughter and fun amongst the discussion of serious issues and a sense of companionship can be felt from some of the language used and reactions given. This 'sense' drives the passion I have for the work that I do and reminds me that we are not, and should not be, us and them, i.e. professionals versus services users, but that we are a team that needs to work together if answers are to be sought.

Women spoken to in the research on which thesis is based had the answers to the questions, or at least could begin to answer the questions; what can we do? What do women need? They were homeless or had experienced homelessness recently, they were reliant on benefits at a time of great welfare reform and they were using the services set out to help them, all things that I had not experienced and therefore could never fully understand or know. As much as I could relate to them, in many ways there was much about them that was unfamiliar and this research demonstrates how much there was to learn.

Although I will never be able to completely share the impact of the journey that creating this thesis has had on me with you the reader, I hope in the following chapters to explore some of the knowledge I gained in each of the areas addressed in the research questions, as well as to reflect on the experience of completing research whilst identifying myself as a practitioner and the conflicts, contradictions and confidence this gave me.

I feel that my journey has taught me more about myself, my professions – both old and new - and the importance of relationships and support not only in my personal life but within these roles too than I ever imagined it could.

1.6 Structure of the thesis

In addition to my position as a researcher an explanation of the way in which this thesis is structured may benefit the reader. An examination of the existing literature surrounding single women's homelessness follows this introduction in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 explains the

methodology used throughout the research; why it was chosen and how it was implemented. The next two chapters portray the findings of this thesis, firstly from the data collection with professionals representing services working with single homeless women in Chapter 4, followed by the findings from the data collection completed with single homeless women in Chapter 5. Chapter 6 offers final reflections demonstrating how the findings have answered the research questions detailed in this chapter; describing the empirical themes and what these mean for single women who are homeless and collating the findings discussed in previous chapters to relate them to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. It offers a visual representation of the research showing the links between the empirical findings of the investigation before exploring the implications for practice and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: The position of women in existing homelessness research

'Our understanding of the experiences, situations and needs of homeless people is rarely based upon an appreciation of gender differentials, which can result in a failure to respond appropriately to the needs of homeless women' (App A: Reeve, Goudie and Casey, 2006)

Homelessness is one in a long line of issues affecting women that has been ignored within research, national policy and local priorities.

Throughout history the literature addressing the causes of homelessness portrays arguments for 'structure vs individual' and endeavours to assign blame to either societal pressures or individual inadequacies. Although there is a general acceptance in more recent research that in truth causes are often fluid and greyer in colour than black or white; these studies have primarily focused on men as the main victims or culprits as they have been the most visible (6: Jones, 1999).

This thesis focuses on single homeless women and their experiences of homeless services. In this literature review evidence will be provided to support that female homelessness is under researched – particularly compared to male homelessness – and that there is a paucity of research focusing on women's experiences of homeless services in the context of the current financial and political climate. This chapter reviews existing literature surrounding single women's homelessness and highlights areas that the research on which this thesis is based investigates showing how they will contribute to knowledge surrounding female homelessness.

The review of the literature began by searching for literature related to my research questions. I therefore began with a list of keywords, 'homeless women', 'homelessness', 'rough sleeping', 'sofa surfing', 'poverty and women', 'street homelessness', 'homeless/housing legislation', 'homeless services', 'researching services' and 'researching homelessness'. I used the University library catalogue, Google Scholar and also the research databases of national housing and homeless support organisations as a starting point. The last two were included due to my pre-existing knowledge of their work in this field and awareness of research already conducted.

The initial 'keyword' list inevitably grew, terms such as 'rooflessness', changing 'women' to 'female' and using similar phrases with 'single' included or tying several keywords and phrases together to expand the search offered further literature to consider. A need to introduce new keywords can be understood further when the phrase 'hidden homelessness' is considered. This phrase is used interchangeably amongst researchers and practitioners to apply to those rough sleeping but trying to remain invisible (often relevant to women), those sofa-surfing and not identifying as homeless or not considered 'statutorily homeless' as they have somewhere to stay and those staying in unsafe conditions as an alternative to street homelessness. In addition the need to search for both female and women became apparent dependant on the researchers and organisations vocabulary.

The reviewing of literature continued throughout the data collection and write up phases of this thesis so that new and updated literature could be included, however the initial stages were perhaps the most important. When reading the literature questions addressing its credibility and suitability were applied, some examples are; what was the source, had it been peer reviewed, had it been supported elsewhere, what sort of methods did it use and did it help to further my understanding? The literature included here was chosen because it in some way furthered my understanding of the issue or helped to define and redefine my research questions.

There is of course literature that has not been included here. Defining a 'single homeless woman' was not a simple task and I have included discussions of how this decision was ascertained in section 1.3. This decision was made in view of the literature, however by excluding women seeking accommodation with children and women fleeing domestic violence, much of the literature surrounding homeless women was omitted initially. Once the data collection with homeless women had taken place it became very clear that the subjects of domestic abuse and motherhood were central to single homeless women's narratives and a further review of this literature was conducted as can be read in section 2.4.

It became clear when reading the literature there was little that emulated the planned research on which this thesis is based within academic research; studies tended to specify a category of women, for example, those with a history of substance misuse, domestic violence or poor health. There was also very little focus on the role of services in supporting people out

of homelessness. In searching the research databases of national housing and homeless organisations however, I was able to increase the amount of relevant literature improving my knowledge and the focus for my own research. Due to homelessness being a political and societal issue, several recent studies tackling the 'problem' had been published having been commissioned through homeless charities. This type of grey literature proved to be more considerate (although not focused) of the role of services and more inclusive in their nature, therefore including more women (although often not exclusively), it also included mainly studies large in size and quantitative in nature.

This quantitative data was useful for indicating some measurements of homelessness, the number of services dedicated to supporting homeless women and the changes within the homelessness support sector at that time. However, it missed the fundamentals of how women experienced their homeless journeys and how being female impacted on that journey. The results offer more general and impersonal data about the experiences of homeless women, but their social context is often unknown. Furthermore, these studies were often commissioned to find solutions to the 'problem' of homelessness; their focus on individuals therefore suggests 'individual choices' are the cause of homelessness and do not fully investigate the structural elements underpinning those. This chapter therefore includes diverse literature from a wide range of sources to inform the research questions and highlight the gaps in current research.

2.1 Placement of women

In 1999 Crisis drew attention to the situation of homeless women in their study *"Out of Sight, Out of Mind"* stating that 'research about the nature and causes of single homelessness has focused on men. Simply put, this is because more men are seen on the streets' (viii: Jones, 1999). In 2006 their follow up study "*Homeless women: still being failed yet striving to survive"* found that 'little appears to have changed' and argued that determining the number of homeless women is made even more difficult because 'national statistics, surveys and datasets provide little by way of information about the female homeless population' (9: Reeve, Casey and Goudie, 2006).

In 2007 Casey et al, focused on women's use of public spaces and attempted to demonstrate the issue of gender on homelessness and make homeless women more visible in their paper

'Resistance and identity: homeless women's use of public spaces'. Ten years later in 2017 Reeve reflected on this paper and found that research into women's homelessness has remained a 'small, discrete area of academic homelessness scholarship' and deemed unimportant in homelessness research in the UK (166: 2017). Reeve continues by stating that 'as a result, academic and policy knowledge generated about homelessness - knowledge on which policies, legislation and responses to homelessness are based - remains inadvertently dominated by the experiences of men' (166: 2017).

Due to the dominance of men and the male experience within homelessness literature much about single homeless males was read in an effort to understand the single homeless experience and to be able to compare to single homeless women's experiences. It was useful as it demonstrated a proclivity for substance misuse, mental ill health and relationship breakdown for homeless people. It also highlighted the issues more common to the female experience of homelessness; reduced support, increased complexities, abuse and conflicting identities, supporting the findings of this thesis. These differences, particularly those related to reduced support, reaffirm that if literature is dominated by men's stories, the needs of men are more likely to be noticed and be seen within service provision and wider policy, making women's situations even direr.

Despite the differences observed above, studies that have included women have not generally considered the impact of gender on the experience of homelessness. Bowpitt and McNeill explain that 'much research into single homelessness largely ignores the gender of the people studied' at times omitting women who have participated in their studies due to their numbers not being significant (1: 2008). May et al (2007) contend that another reason for their omission may be the 'peculiar stigma attached' to homeless women in terms of them being viewed 'as more dangerous and more disturbed than her male counterparts'(p5). The philosophy has its roots within the criminological framework of 'doubly deviant'; for a woman to be criminal – or in this case to be homeless – goes against their very nature.

The view was highlighted by Watson and Austerberry (1986) who cogently argued in their account of women's homelessness that women are negatively isolated in society when it comes to housing issues. They highlight the long history of oppression felt by women in the arena of work and money as an explanation, an argument compounded by Bowpitt and

McNeill (2008) who state 'gender inequalities in the homes and labour market have produced gender inequalities in the housing market' (p2). This literature review summarises the evidence for unequal treatment of women in the workplace and home and how this affects the inability of women to be equal in the housing arena.

This chapter is structured to reflect the themes uncovered within the research on which this thesis reports and addressed in Chapter 6. Section 2.3 and 2.4 consider how we define homelessness and then therefore how it is measured, as well as considering the differences for homeless women in comparison to men. These issues are considered again in Chapter 6 when the theme of identity is addressed; how we define homelessness and how women experience it directly links to how women identify homelessness and themselves when homeless. Section 2.5 and 2.6 then go onto consider the services available and the changes in the welfare state both of which can be strongly linked to the themes of 'poverty of expectation' and 'finances' addressed in Chapter 6, as can section 2.2 and 2.7 which considers women historically.

The literature review begins by exploring how single homeless women have been treated and depicted in history, before moving forward into more contemporary investigations into how single homeless women experience homelessness today. The history of female homelessness was researched to enable the reader, and also myself, to be able to place in context the data collected from the services and the narratives heard from the women. Major legislative changes for housing and for women, both separately and combined, emerged after the end of the First World War and therefore the investigation of literature that focuses on women in housing begins here. The literature depicts a bias towards supporting men and perhaps begins to explain the predisposition of services and research in focusing on men and ignoring women. Furthermore, a focus on the history of homelessness amongst women shows that some of the structural policy factors, originally designed to support men, have not really changed and the ability of women to survive despite this. The review reinforces several of the findings in this research on which this thesis is based and demonstrates how entrenched the struggles are that single homeless females must face. In particular it demonstrates a limitation of services, a reliance on men due to legal restrictions and freedoms and a stigma attached to female homelessness or women on the fringes that are still echoed in today's society. The literature therefore rebuffs the idea of the findings in this thesis being 'general' and establishes a pattern

of missed opportunities to support women in this situation, something that this thesis aims to change.

2.2. Homelessness in history

There were over 700,000 soldiers killed in the First World War from the British Army. As the military was made up mostly of men at this time, this huge loss had two consequences. Firstly there were less men of marrying age in England and secondly there were many women who were widowed due to the war; overall this meant more single women. Without men to rely on financially, as had been the custom historically, women had to find work and support themselves, but afterwards those women were forced to give their jobs to returning soldiers. Many of the single women were resident in accommodation provided by their employers resulting in many women seeking alternatives when their employment was terminated. Women having experienced independence and in some cases losing their husbands combined to determine that the political belief that women could return quietly to their role within the home was misguided; as for many their home life no longer existed (p43, Watson and Austerberry: 1986).

Private housing and lodgings that had met the requirements of these women before the war also faced increased pressures due to the decrease in the building of new homes throughout the war years. Researchers examining social housing argue 'by 1918 there was a severe housing shortage which for economic reasons private enterprise could not tackle effectively…and which for political reasons the state could not ignore' (Malpass and Murie, 1999 cited in Stone, 2003) and that the period between the two World Wars saw 'intervention of the State in the housing market to an unprecedented degree' (Watson and Austerberry, 1986). After the armistice in 1918 'homes for heroes' became an election slogan and the 1919 Housing Act written by Dr Christopher Addison endeavoured to financially subsidise the building of new homes. The Act ensured that housing for working people had now become a national responsibility. Further Acts in the years between the two World Wars made housing a social service, led to the largest clear out of slum housing thus far and resulted in the building of 1.1 million homes being built (www.parliament.uk).

There were two main issues with the new homes that effected single women; unaffordable rents and the focus of providing homes for families. The government had insisted that the new

homes be high quality but had provided low subsidies which meant that in reality only the higher earning working classes could afford the properties on offer. As women were not equally represented or achieving equal rates of pay in the workforce women on their own were predominantly excluded. More direct discrimination of single women was observed by Chesterton (1928) in the inter war period when the London County Council refused to provide the same accommodation for women that they were providing for men, arguing that 'lodging houses for women were harder to manage' (cited in Watson and Austerberry,p45, 1986).

Increasing pressures on the homeless population are represented when in 1935 the Vagrancy Act; 'for the punishment of idle and disorderly Persons, and rogues and vagabonds, in that part of Great Britain called England' was re-enacted (Hudson, 1997). Disorderly persons are described in the Act as those begging in public places and could be imprisoned or sentenced to hard labour if caught. The 1935 Act also included any person 'found wandering' who couldn't explain why; they were considered to be 'rogues and vagabonds' (Hudson, 1997). It ultimately began to criminalise the general homeless population as well as those found begging.

With the onset of the Second World War housing once again became a lesser priority for government and when the war ended they yet again faced many of the same problems that had occurred after WW1, with the addition of many houses demolished or damaged by the bombs. The end of the Second World War also saw the largest shift in policy effecting housing since the introduction of the poor law, which can be traced back to 1536. The 1948 National Assistance Act came about with the introduction of a new Labour government and a focus on welfare legislation, such as the introduction of the National Health Service and a restructured welfare benefit system. The act repealed the old poor laws and was seen as a symbol of the government's intention to 'break with the past' (Cowan, 2011: 147).

Section 21 of the National Assistance Act stated that -
'It shall be the duty of every local authority, subject to and in accordance with the provisions of this Part of this Act, to provide-
(a) residential accommodation for persons who by reason of age, infirmity or any other circumstances are in need of care and attention which is not otherwise available to them;

(b) temporary accommodation for persons who are in urgent need thereof…in circumstances which could not reasonably have been foreseen …'
(www.legislation.gov.uk)

For single homeless women of this period this Act would have made little impact. The temporary accommodation to which it refers was only available to families. As Watson and Austerberry (1986) observed; 'welfare departments had no statutory obligation to accept responsibility for single people who were under retirement age and not infirm' (p52).

Nearly three million housing units were produced in the two decades following the war (8: Stone, 2003). The first of these decades followed the pattern of the housing produced after WW1, predominantly consisting of large good quality homes in good areas intended for the 'deserving poor'. In the mid 1950's however, this began to change. Despite the introduction of the 1948 Act, in reality responsibility for the homeless population was still with social services, their treatment was still dependent on the discretion and moral judgement of workers and the same accommodation that had been used under the poor law continued to be utilised (Cowan, 2011). Analyses of the homeless population at the time 'tended to take what has come to be known as the 'individual pathology' approach (Neale, 1997). This meant that individuals were scrutinised for their role in becoming homeless and decisions were made about whether they were eligible for help.

Those single people that were deemed 'deserving' were provided with temporary accommodation in reception centres that had previously been known as the casual wards (52: Watson and Austerberry, 1986). Accommodation consisted of dormitories in which families would not be housed together and that people with children were often too afraid to use.

Perhaps due to the types of accommodation available to women through local authorities, many single women had continued to reside in private accommodation. The 1957 Rent Act though had created a decrease in the number of private rented homes available. In 1951 52 percent of the housing stock was given over to the private rented sector; by 1961 this had reduced to 31 percent (54: Watson and Austerberry, 1986). Cowley (1979) informs us the Act allowed rent increases and the development of properties which would then become

owner-occupied (p86). This inevitably meant that single women who were not eligible for support from the government had even fewer alternatives.

The 1960's saw considerable advancements for women in England. The revision of the 'Married Women's Property Act' in 1964 allowed women to keep half of any savings they had made during their marriage in the event of a divorce. Seemingly marking a shift in attitude from the belief that, 'women have been regarded as 'by nature' both unsuited to the public realm and rightly dependant on men and subordinated within the family' it inadvertently acknowledged that women's savings generally came from an allowance given to them by their husbands and reinforced women's financial dependence on men (118; Phillips, 1998).

The decade also saw a change in attitude to homelessness from one that blamed the individual to one that focused on the failings of the housing market and society. Concurrently the Seebohm Committee in 1968 and the CHAC report 1969, together with Greve et al (1971) and Glastonbury (1971) conducted research on homelessness in the late 1960's and early 1970's. Their results provided evidence that becoming homeless was a 'symptom of the failure of the housing market' not due to 'individual inadequacy' and concluded that support should come from housing departments rather than social services (148: Cowan, 2011). The circular that followed these conclusions and recommended these changes however was estimated to be implemented by only 60 percent of housing authorities by 1975 (149: Cowan, 2011). The main reason for this was because the 1948 National Assistance Act legally left responsibility with Social Services in England.

Watson and Austerberry (1986) explain that the studies completed by Greves et al and Glastonbury in 1971 exhibit the government's policy of 'treating single people as a special category…and…reinforced the invisibility of the homeless single person' (p56). This omission occurred in both studies which analysed homeless people in temporary local authority accommodation from which single people were 'ineligible' (p55).
Ultimately this ensured recommendations for support were not written to meet the needs of single people and attitudes that may have been shifted regarding homeless families remained the same for single homeless women. Seven years after the research Homeless Action stated: 'There has been a tendency to regard homelessness among single people as a consequence of individual failure' (1977-78, cited in Austerberry and Watson, 1986).

The 1974 Housing Act gave housing associations the financial means to buy and develop properties which saw the biggest expansion in the housing association sector there had ever been. The Act was positive for single people as housing associations were not bound by the same legislation as government departments more focused on families, and many associations used the opportunity to create what they deemed suitable accommodation. Single women would fit this criteria and huge numbers of women moved from private housing, lodging houses and family homes into this type of accommodation.

During the same period there were parallels to the resilience referred to in research of today's female homeless population such as women relying on friends, employment, men and family for accommodation support. The rest of this literature review will focus on these more recent periods and will demonstrate how both the legislation and women's experiences have changed. The next section addresses the literature struggling to measure the issue of female homelessness whilst explaining the definition to be used within the research itself.

2.3 How big is the issue?

Measurements of homelessness can only ever be, at best, an estimate. There can be no truthful figure for the numbers of homeless people in the UK due to differentiation of recording between countries, disparities in definition and the number of homeless people who appear 'hidden'. With that in mind I will summarise the most recent information available regarding women's homelessness with the intention of demonstrating a rising trend and no more than that. Inclusion of this literature aims to show that female homelessness is a growing and very real issue. Through realizing the measures of homelessness we can better judge the amount of work faced by services. The literature will show that the number of women assumed to be homeless has often been determined through quantitative tools gathered for a specific purpose – often funding or campaigning. The research upon which this thesis is based measures single female homelessness at one period in time and in one city, using qualitative methods better placed to present a realistic picture. This will aid further research into the issue of single homeless women and add to the dearth of knowledge in this area.

2.3.1 First to define it

To measure the extent of women's homelessness, even in just one city, a definition must be agreed upon. Definitions are important, not only for the purpose of this thesis so it could include and exclude participants but also within the homeless arena as a whole. Without a

definition of homelessness it is hard to ascertain the support and services that should be delivered to eliminate homelessness; a narrow definition would result in a small number of services offering support in only one area of homelessness – for example rough sleeping (Pleace, et al, 2018). Even more concerning Baptista (2010) argues that under a narrow definition such as rough sleeping or single homelessness 'women's homelessness becomes invisible' (166:2010).

Researchers have historically highlighted how determining a clear definition is one of the major struggles of homelessness inquiry whilst reaffirming its importance in setting the agenda of a study (Farrell, 2001, Phelan and Link, 1999). Although there have been many attempts by researchers to define homelessness, there still appears an 'absence of agreed definitions, across time and place, of what constitutes homelessness' (Williams, 2010).

The European Commission state that 'because of the complexity (of agreeing a definition), it is often the case that narrow definitions are adopted, such as, in particular rough sleeping or sleeping in special shelters, which reduce homelessness to its most visible forms' (4: Fondeville and Ward, 2011). National homeless charity Shelter would agree that the fundamental definition of homelessness is 'someone without a home' however they would argue that only 'some people' in this position live on the streets and that 'much more homelessness is hidden'.

'The Homeless Monitor – England 2018' produced in 2018 defined homeless people - for the purpose of the research - by their inclusion in one of four groups: rough sleepers, single homeless people in hostels/shelters/temporary accommodation, statutory homeless households and 'hidden' homeless households. In agreement other researchers state that 'homelessness cannot simply be equated with rooflessness' (Reid and Klee, 1999) and indeed 'the 'hidden' homeless…need also to be covered to obtain anywhere close to a complete picture' (Fondeville and Ward, 2011).

With this in mind, for the purposes of this inquiry the research will use the wider statutory definition that a person is homeless if they have no access to accommodation of their own that they can legally and/or safely occupy. The reasons for keeping the definition so broad is to reduce the possibility of excluding women who may be without a home but found 'non-statutorily' homeless due to 'intentional homelessness' or other reason. This wider definition

also allows inclusion of the figures and statistics used by local authority services and organisations working with the homeless in the UK most of whom use the 'statutory homeless' definition.

Being statutorily homeless in the UK means that an individual has no accommodation they can realistically be expected to inhabit (Benjaminsen, 2014). The 1996 Housing Act, the Homelessness Act 2002, 2011 Localism Act and the Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation) Order 2002 are all used to determine statutory homelessness, the local authorities' requirement to offer support and at what level that will be (http://homeless.org.uk/about-homelessness).

The 1996 Housing Act was preceded by the 1977 Housing (Homeless Persons) Act which was the first piece of major legislation on homelessness effecting England, Scotland and Wales. The Housing (Homeless Persons) Act of 1977 is often referred to as the 'Cathy Come Home' concept, referring to the docudrama of the same name broadcast in 1966. The drama depicted a young family and their decline into poverty and homelessness. The plight of the young mother and of her children prompted a huge reaction from the British public and a renewed empathy for homelessness, in turn creating a propensity towards new legislation. Such empathy was apparent mainly due to the involvement of children in the scenario, and the Act itself uses a 'priority need' system to decide whom it owes a duty. The Act then can be seen as based on the principles of a deserving and undeserving poor and establishes women without children, such as the single homeless women in this study, as undeserving.

The Housing (Homeless Persons Act) 1977.

Homeless persons and persons threatened with homelessness

(1)A person is homeless for the purposes of this Act if he has no accommodation, and a person is to be treated as having no accommodation for those purposes if there is no accommodation—

(a) which he, together with any other person who normally resides with him as a member of his family or in circumstances in which the housing authority consider it reasonable for that person to reside with him—

(i)is entitled to occupy by virtue of an interest in it or of an order of a court, or

(ii)has, in England or Wales, an express or implied licence to occupy, or

(iii)has, in Scotland, a right or permission, or an implied right or permission to occupy, or

(b)which he (together with any such person) is occupying as a residence by virtue of any enactment or rule of law giving him the right to remain in occupation or restricting the right of any other person to recover possession of it.

(2)A person is also homeless for the purposes of this Act if he has accommodation but—

(a)he cannot secure entry to it, or

(b)it is probable that occupation of it will lead to violence from some other person residing in it or to threats of violence from some other person residing in it and likely to carry out the threats, or

(c)it consists of a movable structure, vehicle or vessel designed or adapted for human habitation and there is no place where he is entitled or permitted both to place it and to reside in it.

(3)For the purposes of this Act a person is threatened with homelessness if it is likely that he will become homeless within 28 days.

The Housing Act (1996) confirmed the definition of a household in priority need for England and Wales. To have a 'priority need' a person must:

A) Have dependent children residing with him or be expected to reside with him

B) Be homeless or threatened with homelessness as a result of an emergency such as flood, fire or any other disaster

C) Be vulnerable (or whomever resides with him must be vulnerable). This could be as a result of old age, mental illness or disability or other special reason.

D) Be pregnant or a member of the household is pregnant.

In 2002 this definition was extended further by the Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation) (England) Order 2002 to include:

- Those homeless applicants aged 16 and 17 years old who are not owed a homeless duty because of having a 'care leaver' or 'child in care' status under the Children Act 1989.
- Those aged under 21 who had previously been in local authority care between the ages of 16 and 18.
- Those aged over 21 who may be vulnerable due to leaving the care of the local authority, armed forces or fleeing domestic violence (or the threat of).

The category of people not found to be owed a 'full housing duty' include all those people who find themselves homeless and do not fit into any of the classifications found in the Housing Act (1996) or Homelessness Order of 2002. Most single homeless people will fall into this category and are therefore often labelled the 'hidden homeless'; they are more difficult to count, monitor and follow, frequently reliant on their own support networks and 'streetwise' intelligence to survive.

As can be seen in the legislation above, since 1977 England, Scotland and Wales have created their own policies towards homelessness and the way in which it should be managed. In 2017 England introduced the Homelessness Reduction Act which placed an emphasis on early intervention for people who may be homeless or at threat of homelessness. One of the biggest changes was the fact that individuals were now considered to be threatened to be homeless if they were likely to become homeless in the next 56 days – instead of the previous 28 days. Furthermore, local authorities now had a duty to provide free advice and guidance to all their residents on preventing homelessness, securing accommodation and the rights of homeless people. However, those not considered to have a 'priority need' are still only entitled to advice and support rather than housing.

2.3.2 Measuring homelessness

Statutory homeless figures are used to provide much of the numerical data around the homelessness situation in England. As well as excluding those not found to be statutorily

homeless they give us no insight into the reasons and experiences or needs and desires of homeless people. As summed up by Benis who states 'contemporary studies of the homeless openly acknowledge that numerical estimates are necessarily incomplete' (2000: 11).

Between October and December 2018 66,390 homelessness assessments were made in England, of these - under the new duties laid out in the 2017 Homelessness Reduction Act – 61,410 were assessed as owed a 'statutory homelessness prevention or relief duty'. Of these 33,020 were owed a prevention duty – meaning any 'activities to enable an applicant to remain in their current home or find alternative accommodation in order to prevent them from becoming homeless', 28,400 were owed a relief duty meaning 'households that are already homeless and require help to secure settled accommodation' (7: Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2019). Of those found to be owed a duty 14,040 were classed as single females and 13,820 single females with children – although what single means could be questioned here. As this thesis will show applying marital status to the way in which a woman is defined and supported as homeless creates another barrier for women in accessing support.

The total number of decisions made by local authorities in England on eligible households – meaning people who are entitled to access public funds and have a local connection to the authority they are applying - in 2017 was 112,200; of which 57,890 were accepted as 'unintentionally homeless and in priority need'[1] and therefore offered a homeless duty. 18,990 of those applications rejected were deemed not to have a priority need, 26,160 were rejected as they were deemed not to be homeless and 9,170 were deemed to be intentionally homeless (Homeless Link: accessed 24/07/19).

The principal classification for people found as being in priority need in 2017 was one predominantly effecting females; with households with dependent children accounting for 38,370 decisions. A further 3,820 decisions were made due to the household containing pregnant women and a further 1380 were due to individuals/families fleeing domestic violence. It is widely accepted by researchers that the majority of homeless families with dependent children are headed up by single mothers (not married/cohabitated/civil partnership) and the majority of those seeking refuge from domestic abuse are women.

Relative to single 'homelessness' it is more arduous and complex to estimate the proportions. 'In fact, to be single and homeless in England is, in the main, to be hidden' (Reeve and Batty, 2011). Hidden homelessness has no set definition but tends to include all those who could be deemed homeless by its most simple definition – having no safe place to live – but who are not receiving support from services. Often hidden homeless refers to those residing on the streets, in squats and sofa surfing.

Due to the very nature of hidden homelessness, it is not possible to understand the scale of the issue as this sector of the homeless population generally does not appear in any statistics. A report commissioned by Crisis, 'The hidden truth about homelessness' demonstrates that the term 'hidden homeless' can be extended to rough sleepers more often considered the most visible of the homeless population (Reeve and Batty, 2011). The study found that amongst this homeless cluster the need to remain hidden was more familiar for women in the survey who stated that they wanted to be out of the way as it made them feel safer (36: Reeve and Batty, 2011).

This invisibility adopted by women means that services are faced with a challenge of how they can work with homeless women. How can they work with women they cannot find? Sleeping rough in an area that cannot be seen means that these individuals will often not be reached by rough sleeping teams who would normally support this group. The Combined Homeless and Information Network (CHAIN) 2018/19 report showed that 1,401 women were seen rough sleeping in Greater London equating for 16 percent of the total number of individuals counted, the figure was broadly consistent with the numbers seen the year before. The official rough sleeping count for the city that is explored in this research was 25 for the autumn of 2018; this was triple the number that had been seen the previous autumn. There are no other figures for the city that test the reliability of this number and it does not state the sex of these individuals. The dangers of rough sleeping for women will be discussed further in section 2.4 regarding experiences of homeless women.

Research by Homeless Link in 2018 showed that 28 percent of people using homeless accommodation services are female (Homeless Link (a), 2018). Together with statistics provided by CHAIN this supports the view that female homelessness is a large and real issue. Although most numerical data validates the view that there are higher numbers of homeless

men than women; it also makes evident that female homelessness equates to a significant proportion of the homeless population.

2.3.3 One City in time

Information in this section came from statistics acquired from Service 1 when the fieldwork took place. They are therefore a reflection of the figures being addressed at the time of the fieldwork and are not more current. The statistics, used to inform the local authorities housing responsibility within the city that this research is based, illustrate that women were significantly represented amongst those with a housing need. 56 percent of those registered on their systems to apply for local authority housing in 2011/12 were female. Although you do not have to be homeless to register your application; the figure implies that more women were unhappy with their current housing situation.

Of those single homeless people found to be statutorily homeless in 2012/13, 94 percent of applicants with dependent children were female and 62 of the 108 that applied without dependents were women (Service 1). The number of women who accessed the commissioned homeless services in the city in the year 2011/12 was not specified, however, there was recognition in the supporting documents for the new (at the time) homeless strategy that 'there are…gaps in provision for women' consisting of 'a lack of direct access services and accommodation for homeless women' in the city.

This omission demonstrates that any statistical information on the number of women using services in the city would be a disingenuous reflection on the actual number of homeless single women in the city. We can also know that the local authority considers homeless services to be those that solely support women with their accommodation issues. This research will include women who use any service supporting them whilst they are homeless and use in-depth qualitative techniques to obtain a fuller and truer picture of this city.

Further challenges to measuring single female homelessness comes from how they manage their situations. In addition to 'hiding' themselves the literature shows women will use other methods to survive homelessness that are specific to their gender and makes finding them even more difficult. Evidence to show that women experience homelessness differently to men and that they are at even greater risk if they are not supported will now be addressed.

2.4 How does women's homelessness differ?

'Women can be more at risk from certain causes of homelessness, such as domestic violence and abuse, and may also require different services due to the specific needs they have' (www.homeless.org,uk/women).

Crisis support the principle that women's homelessness should be understood independently from homelessness as a whole explaining that 'failing to understand the distinct and unique situations of homeless women ultimately results in a failure to develop appropriate responses and prevent homelessness amongst women' (Crisis, 2008). The same report suggests different ways in which policy can support homeless women starting with recognising 'that gender does influence homeless women's situations' and that we need to 'address situations where services are not sensitive to the experiences and needs of women' (1:2008).

2.4.1 Construction of homelessness

'Homelessness' conjures up for most people images of beggars, alcoholics, persons sleeping in shop doorways and engagement in pastimes that 'threaten the civility of a revitalised public space and whose lead players are, almost without exception, cast as men' (5: May et al, 2007). If women are portrayed in the homeless population the image is often far removed from that of any other female and they are seen as unnatural and 'a challenge to the female body' (5: May et al, 2007). Homeless women are therefore often linked to prostitution or portrayed as vulnerable young girls or old bag ladies, each reducing the threat to society.

The lack of awareness about the reality of what it means to be a homeless woman has been blamed on their low visibility. Homeless Link ((a) 2017) assert that 'many women end up living in a range of hidden and marginalised situations', Bretherton and Pleace (2018) believe that to ensure women are included in research the definition of homelessness being used needs to be broader and that when 'various forms of hidden homelessness are included, women are much more evident' (20:2018). The idea of women being 'hidden' was discussed above and is widely recognised in the literature regarding women's homelessness; May et al, support the finding when discussing the way in which feminist scholars before them have accepted that 'women are less likely than men to sleep rough or to engage in other activities (such as begging) that

mark them as 'visibly homeless'' and have therefore focused on the hidden homeless female population (3: 2007).

Watson (1999) reports how in the 1930's one London Council did not want to provide beds for their female homeless as 'giving them beds would have made them visible and belonging to a society in a way that could not be tolerated' (as cited in May et al, 2007). This approach and an unwillingness to seek, find and accept women as homeless has added to women's invisibility and may be why women were absent from much research and legislation until more recently.

2.4.2 Complex Needs

Focused research demonstrates a growing acceptance that women face struggles when homeless that are specific to their gender and could be considered deviating from societal norms; which may further add to society's wish to ignore the issue.

In 2011 an investigation commissioned by Crisis described single women's experiences of homelessness as 'unique' (p50). The research used a combination of 437 surveys and 27 interviews of single homeless people. It questioned both men and women and was able to make comparisons between their experiences. It found that women participants expressed a desire to remain hidden and that to do so they acquired different methods than men in the study. Twice as many women had formed unwanted sexual relationships to have a bed for the night and 20 percent of women compared to just three percent of men had participated in sex work to get enough money to pay for accommodation for a night. The revelations above are concerning, as the question of female safety lies at the heart of them.

This thesis will question why women are not accessing services whilst providing evidence to future researchers and services to better support homeless women.

The 2011 study is not alone in its findings. McNaughton and Saunders (2007) also present evidence that violence within relationships is a factor leading to homelessness more specifically for women (cited in Henry et al, 2010). The 1996 Housing Act and the Homelessness Act 2002 resulted in people fleeing domestic violence being owed a duty of care from the local authority. In theory they meant that domestic violence should not result in homelessness, however all the studies included here described violence in the home as being a

contributory factor to single female homelessness, furthermore these findings are repeated here in Chapter 5.

Trauma, often long term, frequently precedes female homelessness. In 1995 Tomas and Dittmar expressed that women 'are much more likely than men to have had histories of sexual or physical abuse' (p494). More recent research shows that their findings are still apparent. Domestic violence is a commonly associated with female homelessness and any study examining women who are homeless acknowledges that in some form – whether indirect or directly – domestic abuse is a factor leading to female homelessness (Bretherton and Pleace, 2018).

Tomas and Ditmar (1995) also provide earlier reports of further differences between male and female homelessness citing several studies that found homeless women had higher rates of 'major mental illness…more difficulty in current life circumstances…more chronic health problems…and a higher rate of attempted suicide' than men (p494). Homeless Link ((a) 2017) support the findings describing female homelessness as 'catastrophic' and stating that 'violence, trauma, substance misuse and domestic abuse are just some of the complex and interrelating problems that contribute to women's homelessness and presents barriers to recovery' (3:2017).

However, studies also found that not all issues are experienced solely by one sex and have shown that both genders were 'equally as likely' to be dependent on substances, to sleep rough, to have had 'disrupted education' and to be long term unemployed and therefore dependant on benefits (19: Crisis, 2011). Dwyer et al (2011) also found in their study on multiple exclusion homelessness (MEH) that although women do experience MEH differently it may not be 'to the degree implied in some earlier research' and that as well as the similarities listed above equally high levels of trauma and mental health problems were evident in their respondents.

2.4.3 Access to Services

The need for services to address women's homelessness as a separate entity to homelessness as a whole is compounded by women's perceptions and attitudes towards their experience. Henry et al (2010) describe women's attachment to the home as intensifying the trauma for

women when they become homeless, 'the home has become the focus of many women's lives and central to their sense of identity and self-esteem'. Tomas and Dittmar (1995) found that women believed 'home' to be very different from a 'house', and that for a house to be a home it must also offer security and warmth; 'defining homelessness as a housing issue exclusively, and proposing solutions on that basis, thus neglects the experience of home for women.'

For services to work therefore they must be able to support them differently. This research will consider how services could better support the women that access them and provide recommendations for services considerate to today's economic society. The next section will look at the literature on women's use of services and the challenges facing organisations at this time.

2.5 Services

'Concerted efforts should be made to respond to and rectify gender-insensitive service provision'

(8 Reeve, Casey and Goudie, 2006)

As stated previously services are central to the solution to homelessness yet there are few examples of studies investigating how women experience them. This thesis will help to bridge the gap in this knowledge seeking to understand how services play a part in supporting homeless women and ensuring that the women's views are exposed.

One of the largest studies to consider use of services, although it did so within a wider investigation, was commissioned by Crisis. Reeve, Casey and Goudie (2006) found that nearly 40 percent of their sample of homeless women did not access services or 'seek formal…help or assistance' on first finding themselves homeless, and 23 percent had no regular contact with any support agency (p63). The report considers the types of services accessed, the barriers and constraints to those services, awareness and positive experiences of services. It found that women preferred an informal service, easily accessible, offering 'women-only space' and being 'like home' (p70). St Mungo's support these finding reporting that women 'value clean, private, safe and homely accommodation' (St Mungo's, 2011). The findings presented in

Chapter 5 endorses these findings further showing women delay their access to services linked to homelessness.

Henry et al (2010) looks directly at women's use of homeless services. The study is based in Bristol and commissioned by the local authority to map the services available to women. It found that women did want gender specific services and that these could 'result in significant and positive changes in their lives' (p17). The report argues that the Gender Equality Duty 2007 might result in government policy becoming 'gender neutral' and therefore mixed homeless services taking preference, a move that would be to the detriment of homeless women.

A review in 2017 showed that only seven percent of homeless accommodation services were women only services, eighty five percent were classed as 'mixed accommodation' (Homeless Link (b), 2017). This meant that throughout England in 2017 there were only 75 projects specifically set up and designed for women despite the findings in literature that women prefer female only projects and at times actively avoided mixed homelessness services (Bretherton and Pleace, 2018).

In 1999 Jones limited her focus to services related to where the women slept, discussing services such as night shelters and hostels. In direct contrast to the findings of Cramer in 2002, Reeve, Casey and Goudie in 2006 and Henry et al 2010, this study found that women who had experienced both mixed and women-only accommodation preferred mixed (p66). Again the limited focus does not allow for understanding of the use of wider services by women who are homeless and their experiences.

2.5.1 Access to Services

Mayock and Sheridan (2012) argue that many of the women they interviewed had spent a significant amount of time in hidden homeless situations and had not accessed services, either due to fear or unwillingness to associate with homeless people (p5). Their results support the findings of the 2006 study referred to above that showed services such as the Big Issue were not accessed because many women were unwilling to be associated with homelessness (66: Reeve, Casey and Goudie, 2006).

"Climbing Everest Naked" found that women were viewed as more challenging than men to work with in hostels (p28: Chandler and Cresdee, 2008). St Mungo's analysis of their outcomes data also found that their work with women differed to that of men. They found that 'female clients were coming into the services with a higher level of support need, and also progressing more slowly than men in projects', neither report however allows us to hear from the women themselves (2011). Lieblow (1993) in his American inquiry into homeless women asserts that the existence of power in the relationships between women and services impinges on their ability to engage with one another. He believed that the staff feared the women; being violent - and the women feared the staff; being evicted (137: Lieblow, 1993).

Further existing barriers for women accessing services have been recorded as a lack of awareness, fragmentation of service, inflexibility, appearing unwelcoming and a lack of services for younger age groups (Reeve, Casey and Goudie, 2006). These barriers are likely to have been exacerbated by the austerity measures, to be discussed next, which has impacted on the number and types of services being delivered.

When starting this study the majority of homeless services in England relied on funding through 'Supporting People'. Supporting People funding intended to provide support for all vulnerable people in England. It had been ring-fenced since 2003 but in 2011 the fence was lifted and the money could now be spent by local authorities on areas they felt needed it. At that time over one million people were receiving Supporting People services at any one time in England. With the reductions in funding throughout the local councils it meant that the funding for homeless services decreased and therefore the prioritisation of homeless women had moved further down the line.

Homeless England identified reduced numbers of accommodation projects by five percent and day centres for homeless people by eight percent in 2016. The same report showed that 39 percent of providers had received reduced funding whilst another 38 percent of providers funding had remained the same (Homeless Link (b), 2017). This follows several consecutive years of diminishing service provision. The Survey of Needs and Provision 2013 (SNAP, 2013) showed that the homeless sector had shrunk throughout 2012 whilst the number of homeless people had risen by ten percent. They also discovered five out of ten projects had seen their funding fall by 17 percent, the number of full time staff had reduced by 16 percent and in the

year up to November 2012 58 accommodation projects had closed and nearly 2000 bed spaces were lost. The next section will look more closely at the changes occurring in the homeless sector in the current political climate.

2.6 Time for a change

It is…extremely worrying that the Coalition Government's radical reform of the welfare and housing safety nets look set to weaken the very systems that have traditionally provided a 'buffer' between vulnerable households and homelessness…[these changes] seem certain to drive homelessness up in England over the next few years' (Fitzpatrick et al, 2011)

This research took place during a time of significant change to social security and welfare support in England. I will briefly explain some of those changes and how and why they are important to homeless women. The purpose of this is to help contextualise the research and the challenges facing the women participants at the time of interview.

When this research began England was just beginning to come out of a five year long recession and the changes promised by a new conservative/coalition government were beginning to be introduced. The impact of the recession on the housing situation throughout the country cannot be ignored when considering women homeless throughout this time. Fondeville and Ward reported in 2011 that there had been a significant rise in the number of people being recognised as homeless 'in some areas more than 50%' and that this was a direct result of 'rent arrears and mortgage defaults' (p16). The obvious financial implication for affording housing is intensified by the reported housing crisis in England. 'As a nation, we've failed to build enough new houses over the last few decades…The recession has exacerbated this situation in the short term, with many banks and building societies unwilling to take the risk of lending to first-time buyers, and new construction slowing even further' (Kingman, 2012).

2.6.1 Crisis for women

Since then the pressures facing the housing system throughout the country have not improved, the number of homeless people has continued to rise and our housing system is still 'in crisis' (Reis, 2019). The 'impacts of that crisis are gendered. Women's lower incomes relative to men's means they are less able to afford housing' (3: Reis, 2019). This quote comes from a recent report from the Women's Budget Group – 'A home of their own: housing and

women'. The report addresses the issue of a gender gap in housing affordability. Its findings show that the gap in affordability for house purchases and rentals is much larger for women than it is for men, and that specific groups of women – those fleeing domestic abuse or with complex needs for example – are even more likely to be excluded from being able to afford suitable housing (Reis, 2019).

In addition the same report highlights the impact of cuts to social security and the changes created through its reforms since 2010 stating that women make up 60 percent of housing benefit claimants and that 90 percent of private renters on housing benefit in 2015 faced shortfalls. They found that this shortfall has led to annual losses of assured short hold tenancies quadrupling since 2010, causing homelessness in a quarter of households found statutorily homeless (Reis, 2019).

"The Gender Impact of Welfare Reform" published by the Scottish government in August 2013, had previously also found even before many of the changes had been introduced that 'women lose out in a direct financial sense from changes already introduced and other planned changes [to benefits]' (1: Communities ASD, 2013). The report found that women were the key beneficiaries for benefits such as working tax credits, child benefits and child tax credits, and that the amount received by women on these benefits had been reduced. Further support for these findings is found in an analysis by the House of Commons Library that established almost 75 percent of the austerity measures put in place negatively affected the income of women (How have coalition budgets effected women?, 2010).

The Women's Budget Group (WBG) has been researching the impact of welfare reform and changes in budget since the change in government in 2010. It has produced several reports – including the one above – demonstrating the impact on women. When the research for this thesis began they had recently published their report *"The impact on women of the budget 2012".* It stated that, 'that the [new] budget will further undermine gender equality in the UK' and illustrated three main areas of the budget that were of grave concern. Firstly, through increased unemployment. There were more women working in the public sector, outnumbering men by a third. The estimated number of jobs to be lost in the sector by 2017 was 730,000 adding to women's unemployment, already at its highest for 25 years. Secondly through reduced wages. As well as redundancies many public sector employees were being

asked to take pay cuts or being denied cost of living increases in return for keeping their jobs. Quoting evidence that higher wages were more likely in the public sector than the private sector, the public sector had issued pay cuts, however, the report argued that this was only true of middle paid workers and the action would disproportionately impact those on lower wages already earning less than their private sector counterparts; and who are more likely to be women. In addition the minimum wage, most likely to be earned by a female had also reduced in real terms with the 11p rise not meeting the increased cost of living. Thirdly, in the reduction in welfare spending. One-fifth of women's income at this time came from benefits, which was double the amount claimed by men.

In 2019 they produced a more recent report 'Triple whammy: the impact of local government cuts on women'. This report shows that English councils had faced a 28.6 percent drop in spending power since the introduction of the new coalition and conservative government in 2010 and the financial year of 2017/18, this equates to an estimated £16 billion cut from council budgets by 2020 (4: Wakefield, 2019). The impact of these cuts has disproportionately affected women. This is due to cuts being focussed on areas such as social care, child care, women's refuges and youth services. The WBG explains that despite a large increase in the number of people needing care the amount being spent on social care had dropped by 3 percent by 2017 from 2010. This example alone disproportionately affects women due to the larger proportion of female care workers, unpaid carers and recipients of care (Wakefield, 2019). Further cuts to the public health sector – £96.3 million in 2018/19 alone – and the voluntary sector - who lost £802 million between 2010/11 and 2015/16 – have further increased the pressure on women who predominantly work in and use those services.

2.6.2 Homeless women

What these cuts in local authority funding means for female homelessness is that local authorities have less recourse to support those at risk of homelessness whilst facing an increase in the likelihood of females needing support for housing difficulties. In addition local authorities are responsible for administering housing benefit – now a part of Universal Credit - for many individuals. Housing benefit is the main benefit supporting people on low incomes or without employment, and it is this that ensures people in these categories can pay toward their accommodation.

Reductions and changes to housing related benefits 'break the link altogether between housing benefit and local rents' and ensure even more properties will gradually become out of reach for those claiming benefits (Crisis, 2012). In April 2011 the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates across England were reduced. It meant that the rate would now be based only on the cheapest thirty percent of rents in each locality rather than the previous rate of fifty percent, making even fewer houses affordable (www.shelter.org, 2012). Stephenson and Harrison (2011) argue that 'cuts to LHA will have a disproportionate impact on women since women are the main recipients'. Their report shows 4,360 single women and 2,085 women in couples living in the city it investigated were claiming LHA and that the cuts, between £8 and £15 per week, could force some women into poverty (2011).

For single homeless women housing options were reduced further in January 2012. Single people under the age of 35 were made subject to the same housing benefit entitlements previously reserved for the under 25's. The changes meant that single people under 35 would only receive Housing Benefit based on the shared accommodation rate in the private rented sector creating greater competition for this type of property. Furthermore reductions in LHA to both properties and room rates and increases in rent prices has meant that the amount of housing benefit being received by individuals is not covering the full rent required and creating the shortfalls mentioned above (Reis, 2019).

2.6.3 More change

Since this study began the government has also introduced a 'cap' to benefits which has meant that women of working age can only claim a maximum amount no matter the size of the family they are claiming for. The cap currently is set at £20,000 per annum for the locality in which the research is set. The 'benefit cap' predominantly impacts larger families, specifically their housing as the first element of benefits to be cut is housing benefit once the cap is reached, and women. As previously explored women are the key beneficiaries for welfare support, meaning they are the most likely to be affected by any 'cap'.

Other changes to the benefit system have now been implemented since this research started. Changes to how people receive their benefits was to be rolled out across the country by 2016 with all benefits to be combined in a single payment and named Universal Credit. Universal credit was introduced in the Welfare Reform Act 2012 and is paid to people of working age

both in and out of work 'replacing working tax credit, child tax credit, housing benefit, Income Support, income based JSA and ESA' (www.legislation.gov.uk, 2012). People are paid monthly rather than fortnightly and an emphasis is placed on people to receive and be responsible for paying their own housing benefit. The previously mentioned report issued by the Scottish government had found that the introduction of universal credit would make life more challenging for women who are more likely to be responsible for budgeting within their household. Universal credit is still in the process of being rolled out across the country but this finding has been upheld in other research which agrees universal credit is 'having a negative impact' (Reis, 2019). In 2017 Shelter released a briefing sharing their specific concerns regarding Universal Credit and homelessness. Their main concern was the wait facing people transitioning to or applying for Universal Credit. The briefing shared anecdotal reports from homeless services and people that demonstrated they were unable to find funds to support them or contribute to accommodation whilst they were waiting for their benefits to start and the wait was leading to the development of arrears, usage of foodbanks or in some cases eviction (Gill et al, 2017).

The challenges described here and presented to women by society and the political age in which they live are not new to women. The final section of this literature review will consider the evidence of unequal treatment faced by women throughout history in the workplace and in the home and how this has resulted in the inability for women to be equal in the housing arena.

2.7 Pay and Poverty

'It is not sufficient to simply acknowledge that poor people are both women and men. Poverty is more complexly gendered, as men and women are often poor for different reasons, experience poverty differently, and have differing capacities to withstand and or escape poverty'

(8: Whitehead, 2003)

Poverty is another area of research where women have been absent from the discourse and not 'generally remarked upon' (20: Glendinning and Miller cited in Maclean and Groves, 1991). It is perhaps obvious to state that there is a proven link between poverty and homelessness as

evidence is so well documented. But it is certainly impossible to have any discussion on women's homelessness without addressing the issue. This section will focus on how women have been marginalised financially and therefore pushed more significantly to a state of homelessness. This will support the need to understand women's experiences of homeless services in the context of the recent austerity measures affecting the income of women and the purpose of this research.

2.7.1 Defining poverty

'Existing research confirms the importance of the relationship between income and access to housing' (Sexty, 1990). Poverty is understood in existing literature through two dominant definitions – the relative and the absolute. Absolute poverty is the lacking of basic resources needed to survive, such as those listed in Maslow's hierarchy of needs, including food, water and shelter. Poverty is calculated by the government through measuring household income, with sixty percent of median income acting as the poverty line; those who fall below it are declared as in poverty. There are arguments amongst researchers and campaigners as to whether the calculations give a true account of who is in poverty as it does not consider how wealth is distributed amongst that household and whether it is executed equally, or other indicators such as 'life chances' (25: Glendinning and Millar cited in Maclean and Groves 1991).

Poverty and Social Exclusion in the UK (PSE: UK), argue that it would be better to use Townsend's approach of examining 'relative deprivation' to gauge poverty. The approach includes considering those with an income that does not allow them to 'consume' and 'participate' in a way that would be considered normal as in poverty, or in his words 'their resources are so seriously below those commanded by the average individual or family that they are, in effect, excluded from ordinary living patterns, customs and activities' (31: Townsend, 1979)

Either approach or definition however would seem to find women at a disadvantage due to the lack of opportunity for women to enjoy similar incomes as men. Single women in particular have been identified as among the key groups that would be most vulnerable to poverty (Mack and Lansley, 1985, Gordon et al, 2000). The issue of women systematically being overrepresented in the groups defined as living in poverty is referred to as the 'feminisation of poverty', the roots of which can be seen in history (295: Maye-Banbury, 2011).

2.7.2 Women in history

Since the onset of the First World War women have played a significant part in the UK's employment market when they were expected to support industry whilst men went to war. When the war ended women were expected to return to their role within the home. This was a somewhat misguided expectation, as for many their home life no longer existed (p43, Watson and Austerberry: 1986). Before the war women would have traditionally stayed in the family home until they married, relying on their husbands to provide for them financially. With a lack of men – due to huge losses in the war – many women had to continue to rely on their parents or become more independent, which without a welfare state meant finding work.

However, legislation such as the Married Women's Property Act (1964) suggests that the tradition of reliance still continued in the 1960's. A major factor restricting female independence was their inability to earn an equal wage creating a dependence on others for money. Today this is still a significant contributor to hidden homelessness for women demonstrated in the literature when women stay with others for security but with no claim to the accommodation.

In 1968 850 women went on strike at the Ford factory in Dagenham to argue against the assumption that they were less skilled than their male counterparts and should therefore be compensated in the same way which started a reformation that resulted in the Equal Pay Act. The Equal Pay Act 1970 (although it did not come into force until 1975) prohibited unequal pay and working conditions for men and women, yet despite this, evidence suggests that the gender pay gap has only halved since then.

2.7.3 Contemporary women and the gender pay gap

The Office of National Statistics showed that in 2018 the gender pay gap stood at 17.9% when considering all employees, for full time employees it is 8.6% showing that despite the introduction of legislation for equal pay women's real ability to be equal to their male counter parts has still not been achieved. Despite the increase of females in the workforce figures released in November 2013 by Trade Union Congress (TUC) showed that women working full time earn almost £5,000 less than men a year and in some professions the gap could be much

greater, for example in the private sector the pay gap between men and women is 19.9 percent (www.tuc.org.uk).

Due to decreased wages women find it harder than men to be able to afford the same level and cost of housing. Finding themselves instead more inclined to rent than enter the world of home-ownership. The affordability of the private rented sector can also be questioned and has been in the findings of "*Housing the Poorer Sex"* where they found women were more likely to reside in unsuitable properties (London Housing Unit, 1993).

Earnings figures are of particular concern for women who are vulnerably housed, restricting their ability to leave an unsafe or unhappy living environment because choosing to do so could make them homeless; as in Jones narrating the story of a woman who found herself homeless due to leaving her partner, 'because I am a woman I had no income' (20: 1999). In 2008 the Joseph Rowntree Foundation resolved that four out of five women living with a male partner contributed less than half to the household income and one out of five women would be without an independent income if they could not claim child benefit (Leigh, 2008).

Furthermore Reeve, Casey and Goudie (2006) found that the single homeless women they included in their study tended 'to occupy a much marginalised position in the labour market', with only four of their 126 respondents being in work – and all of those were working part time (p8). The same study suggested that over 70 percent of the single homeless women they spoke to were claiming welfare benefits.

With such a high prevalence of benefit dependency any changes and reductions to entitlements would most certainly impact negatively on its claimants. In the midst of the largest welfare reform in forty years then, it is clear there will be major implications for its recipients and a subsequent impact on homelessness.

2.8 Conclusion

A review of the literature revealed gaps in the current knowledge on single homeless women's experiences of homeless services. These are:

- The gap in academic literature created by research targeted towards specific issues experienced by homeless women, e.g. domestic violence, motherhood and health.

This has led to much research missing the wider experiences of homeless women as a population.

- A dearth of wider research providing an intimate and detailed exploration of women's experiences, specifically the service experience of single homeless women.
- The paucity of research that focuses on single homeless women in the age of welfare reform.
- The gap in knowledge of single homeless women's experiences of homeless services in the context of the recent economic and societal pressures so crucial in this current political climate
- The scantiness of research that considers women's narratives of their experiences of homeless services so unique and impossible to duplicate.

This chapter has drawn on existing literature and the wider socio-economic, historical and political context to consider the issues facing individual single homeless women and the wider female homeless population as a whole. The statistics demonstrate the rise in the number of homeless people, and women, 'measured' in the UK; reminding us of the very real issue behind this research. The statistics are even more concerning when we consider the cuts to services and funding for this vulnerable and at risk population. With this in mind it is more important than ever that interventions and support are suitable and effective. To ensure that it is, the voices of women, who have long been silenced and marginalised, need to be included.

This research will achieve this through the gathering of women's narratives at one time and in one city. With changes affecting the entire country, findings at a time of such significance will be crucial to comprehending the wider impact of services and welfare reform on single homeless women. The next chapter will explain the methods employed by this research to accomplish a greater understanding of the issues presented here.

Chapter 3: Methodology

'Narrative inquiry as a research method facilitates the voices of marginalised groups being heard' (Holloway and Jefferson, cited in Williams and Stickley, 2011: 434)

'A feminist perspective acknowledges women's daily experiences as linked to the larger political, social, and economic structures' (Reid, Berman and Forchuk, 2005, p242). To be true to this feminist perspective I needed a methodology that allowed me to consider the women within the context of their lives. Furthermore, as a researcher I believe that all studies are subjective and only by 'studying' communities within their natural environment can they be truly and authentically understood. In applying this interpretivist's philosophy I have also acknowledged that as researcher I have impacted upon the outcome of this study – this is discussed in more detail in section 3.2. In addition I wanted a methodology that allowed me to present these women with an opportunity to reflect on their experiences and potentially implement change in their futures. To demonstrate all of this I chose to use narrative research methods to tell the story of what it means to be a single woman using homeless services in the midst of such political change. Connelly and Clandinin describe narrative methodology as 'the study of the ways humans experience the world' (2: 1990). Being able to understand the experience of services for single homeless women and how these experiences have impacted on them, is imperative if we are to improve the support and provision available to homeless females.

Qualitative methods were used throughout the research on which this thesis is based so that an in-depth understanding of the women's experiences could be gained. Early into the research process it was decided that quantitative research styles were not suitable for the depth of understanding I wanted to uncover as it was felt that qualitative methods would allow the time and setting more suitable for more private and individual explorations. It has been argued that quantitative research supports the view that homelessness is a symptom of individual failure, that it requires complete objectivity in the analysis of its findings and considers the behaviour of individuals without consideration of their social context (Paradis, 2000: 840). The limitations of quantitative methods and my research perspective therefore meant that quantitative methods were not suitable for the depth of understanding and meaning I wanted to unravel. To more fully appreciate the experiences of women a relationship and context needed to be established. Qualitative methods allowed me the time

and setting more suitable to build this relationship and conduct these explorations (Coufopoulos, 2009, Letherby, 2003). All of the data collected is from primary sources and acquired through face-to-face interactions combining interviews, creative methods and member checking. Decisions regarding the data collection methods were made in the review of the literature that argued research with vulnerable people is unique and requires sensitivity (Liamputtong: 2007).

Deciding on my research methodology was not an easy decision. Before choosing narrative methodology I considered other methods. Participatory Action Research (PAR) and Phenomenology were both qualitative methods researched before narrative methodology was chosen. The timeframe I had for my data collection necessitated that PAR would be inappropriate. It was also felt that the complex and often chaotic nature of the homeless population would make continuity within the research difficult and uncertain. Phenomenology, although at first seeming to embody my purpose of understanding the experience of homeless services through the eyes of homeless women, uses observations as part of its methods. Observations can change the way people behave, they can ensure a different outcome as people's behaviour alters in different situations. I wanted the accounts I gathered to be as unguarded and honest as possible. Furthermore, the skills I have developed over the years of working with people lend themselves more successfully to one-to-one working.

I chose a research methodology that allowed me to keep women central to the research and their views to be heard above all else. It is their input that will make a practical solution possible and therefore they are most important in my study. This chapter begins by explaining the limitations of narrative research and ways to combat them. The chapter continues by asserting my reasons for the use of narrative research methods and my position within the research as a former practitioner. The chapter then clarifies the methods used throughout the research on which this thesis is based. Firstly discussing the mapping study conducted, it demonstrates how access was gained to the services identified, how the requirements of the research ethics committee were met in my mapping study and illustrates how the data was collected. The fieldwork with women is discussed next demonstrating which data collection methods were chosen to acquire women's stories, how women were recruited and an overview of the women included in the study. The chapter further breaks down each stage, including an explanation of the two ways that narrative methodology will be applied within

this study and its compatibility with my aims in this research. Chapter Three concludes with a detailed explanation of how the data will be interpreted and how the methodological decisions worked in practice.

3.1 Why narrative?

There is much discussion about how narrative methodology is understood with its use widespread amongst different 'topics of study, methods of investigation and analysis and theoretical orientations' (Andrews, Squire and Tamboukou, 2008 and May). Often used as an umbrella term to include a combination of methodological approaches it has been firmly established within the social sciences since the 1990's becoming a 'significant part of the [social sciences] repertoire' and continuing to rise in popularity (1: Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber, 1998). Polkinghorne argues that 'this interest is merited because narrative is the linguistic form uniquely suited for displaying human existence as situated action' (5:1995).

The use of narrative research methods, is based in the theory of social constructionism. This theory believes that the way people view themselves and experience their situation is 'constructed' through their cultural, societal and personal interactions. To express a person's experience therefore is to use their words to explain it, rather than to tell their stories for them. Holloway and Freshwater explain narratives as 'accounts of people's experiences over time' (2007, cited in Williams and Stickley, 2011: 434). People often relate stories to fiction; however narrative methods determine stories as people's 'experiential realities' (Nelson et al, 2005: 98). Carr said 'it is moral for all of us to see our responsibility in forming each other's stories', meaning that we can and do influence the experiences of others (1986, cited in Davis 2006: 14). It is this perspective that has led to the rise in popularity of narrative methods within social and health research and that led me to finally choose it.

Working as a professional with homeless individuals within statutory and voluntary sectors as well as in a voluntary capacity, I have spent many years challenging the perceptions and views of family, friends and others who have questioned my reasoning for supporting such a 'problem' area of society. As much as I have attempted to relay the many different circumstances and events that have led clients to homelessness my arguments lack the sentiment of a personal account. This I feel is because these stories, although of others, have been told in my words and through my eyes. The use of narrative research methods allowed

me to change this with this thesis becoming a platform to express the personal experiences of homeless women.

Furthermore when considering the different views of others and myself, I became aware that they could not fully comprehend my arguments because I do not fully understand the experience and this could be heard within my storytelling. My knowledge comes from the narratives I have been told and the observations I have made as a professional. These have then been framed within my own story, the outcome of my own culture, experiences and professional and personal values. With this realisation came a desire to know. As a woman and a professional working predominantly with homeless men I particularly wanted to answer, how do women experience homeless services and what do they need from us?

Nelson et al (2005) and Tomas and Dittmar (1995) explain that narrative inquiry allows for a greater depth of understanding of the individual circumstances. They argue that the detailed narratives provided by individuals will determine recommendations and conclusions that are more useful in practice, as we as 'outsiders' will be able to make more sense of the participants lived experiences. William and Stickley offer support to this argument referring to the fact that their participants wanted to present their story, 'their performance narratives were given in the hope of helping to bring about political change (by engaging with the research)' (434: 2011). In addition the principle that participants 'had a desire for their stories to be told' fits my aspirations to express the position of single homeless women using homeless services (434: William and Stickley, 2011).

Once I began to read the existing literature I became aware that the issues of women being neglected and left out of homeless research and homeless policy were widespread. I have referred previously to literature that demonstrates the struggles of homeless women and the need for them to have a voice within this discipline and with this support, this became the foundation of this PhD study. As with all methodologies narrative research has its limitations.

3.1.1 Limitations of Narrative Research

Overarching criticism of narrative research has come from the use of 'narrative' itself. Narrative as a word means so many different things to different people. Andrews, Squire and Tamboukou (2013) argue that the popular and frequent use of the term narrative has meant

that it is sometimes viewed with suspicion 'as obfuscators of the 'realities' they gloss and hide' (p3). To understand what it means within research there needs to be a clear definition and structure to the rules of narrative methods (1: Lieblich and Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber, 1998). A lack of definition and the diversity of the subjects in which narrative research is employed, has led to a multitude of methods and analysis being used creating confusion over its purpose. The need for researchers to apply a clear definition and justification for their methods in their work is therefore clear, something I am aiming to achieve in this chapter.

Bamberg (2012) also offers us words of caution regarding narrative inquiry stating that it can 'blur the boundaries between us living our stories and analysing the stories of others' (p9). Andrews, Squire and Tamboukou (2008) argue that narrative research seems to offer no definitive rules about method of investigation or how to study the stories we hear and therefore although it offers flexibility in reality it is difficult to do. The ability given to researchers to interpret data in any way they wish could lead to reduced subjectivity. Gottlieb and Lasser (2000) in their critique of this method argue that narrative research can create a 'conflict of interest for some researchers' as well as giving them the ability to favour some voices over others (p192).

Nelson et al (2005) established boundaries and considered the truthfulness of the narratives they received by recognising that the participants believed they were '"in cahoots" with the staff' and that this may affect their responses (p102). Tomas and Dittmar (1995) also address this issue by describing their narratives as 'neither true nor false, but simply real' (p498). A willingness of these researchers to acknowledge the subjectivity of the data they receive allows the reader to know that these 'stories' are the perspectives of the participants. Reliability is not therefore the issue in these circumstances. Informing the audience of the context from which this perspective is taken also gives an opportunity for a factual basis. I applied both the environmental framework and transparency to the narratives produced in this research to increase understanding and reduce doubt surrounding the results.

As previously stated Gottlieb and Lasser (2001) argue that some voices are preferred over others. They maintain that due to the unwillingness of authors to include views they do not support or they view as harmful to other participants, such as racism and homophobia, they are not included within research. This method of exclusion 'risks losing what may be a unique

and valuable narrative' but could be unavoidable (p193). To avoid losing this diverse and rich data I have kept my exclusion criteria as inclusive as possible. The work conducted with the participants is on a one-to-one rather than group basis giving the opportunity for the interviewees to be as frank and forthcoming as they wish. Occasion was also given for the women to retract comments and for us to discuss together the information gathered.

Furthermore, Gottlieb and Lasser (2001) claim that participants can be excluded as they are deemed too vulnerable and at risk from the process of the research. Proposed methods for overcoming these issues come from Smythe and Murray (2000) who believe that consistent monitoring of participants and their feelings throughout the investigation would ensure they are protected (cited in Gottlieb and Lasser, 2001). It was my intention to delve deeply into the lived experience of homeless women; section 3.3 shows how this was achieved. To keep them as safe as possible throughout this process I used my experience and knowledge gained from working in this environment to provide information and guidance on supporting services, in addition I did not apply time limits to the interviews, allowing for space and reducing pressure on women.

Finally, the biggest criticism for this method of research is for the positionality of the researcher. I am aware that my career within homeless services and passion for change within this environment impacts on the process itself. The use of reflexivity will make certain the reader can fully understand my views and beliefs placing the evidence of this thesis in this context. An open and honest approach will therefore make sure the onus is on the reader to ascertain how they perceive the data. Providing enough of the narrative's to give the reader a sense of the women themselves is important, not only to my ethos within this research but also to allow the evidence to talk for itself, reducing the influence of my interpretation. The next section will explain my position as a researcher and how and why it may influence the findings.

3.2 My position within the research

> *"*Being reflexive and providing these reflections for public scrutiny is often considered a key element of ethical, rigorous qualitative research' (Bishop and Shepherd, 2011: 1283)
>
> My experiences as a practitioner led me to research. That feeling of failure I had when an ex-client returned for further support, or when I passed individuals in need of support who wouldn't ask for it or worse yet when they did and I couldn't offer it, had meant that I was open to the idea of research when it came to me. I believed that research would not only provide me with a deeper knowledge that would benefit me in my work, but that it may answer all the questions I had about the population I worked with and that through completing research maybe I could have a wider impact.
>
> My personal view and previous experiences are therefore not only certainly relevant to the journey I travelled throughout the completion of my research, but also to the outcome of the research itself.
> Feminist research has for a long time considered the position of the researcher and their relationship with the research, arguing that impact and influence are unavoidable and therefore should be recognised and transparent to the reader (Cotterill and Letherby, 1993: 68). The idea that the readers need to understand the context of the researchers reasoning process to better understand and interpret the findings is definitely not new and is one I affiliated with in the very early days of the research process (Stanley, 1990). Before I knew much about feminist epistemology it was in fact this 'influence' that I believed would make me a good candidate for a studentship to complete this PhD inquiry.'

The process of the research is just as integral to this inquiry as the findings themselves, an insight into the process will provide the reader with further understanding of the data's final interpretation. As argued by Pole (2007, cited in Mannay, 2013:3) the relationship that is built between the participant and the researcher is integral to the reliability of the data gathered, the reflexive accounts I have provided will provide an insight into my own experiences and this relationship. Feminist geographers teach us to acknowledge partiality and then to adopt a form of reflexivity to better understand the researcher, the researched and the research context (Rose, 1997: 1). Transparency in the research process acknowledges partiality through demonstrating the positionality of the researcher and the impact of this on the findings. This chapter therefore shares important knowledge with the reader of the way in which knowledge was gathered and how and why certain decisions surrounding the research process were made, allowing the reader to gain a greater insight into the experience of women using homeless services and the setting and circumstances surrounding the data gathering process.

I am aware that my own societal beliefs, values and perceptions have influenced the reporting of the narratives and ultimately the narratives themselves, but I also believe that using a method 'described as liberating and empowering' amongst a group often marginalised and isolated in society, enables the research to be both informative and supportive of the participants (434: Holloway and Jefferson, 2000 cited in Williams and Stickley, 2011).

Skeggs (2004) argues that a person's perspective will only ever be based on the knowledge they have of a situation (cited in Mannay, 2013:3). Reflexivity is therefore key to giving the reader the knowledge of the conditions and perspective from which the narratives are gathered. Mannay (2013) states that 'a recurring and unresolved issue for researchers is that of whose voice is being spoken' (p1). Narayan argues that, '"[T]he days in which natives were genuine natives (whether they liked it or not) and the observer's objectivity in the scientific study of Other societies posed no problem" are over' (cited in Kanuha 2000: 440). As previously stated I am aware that my experience working within the homeless sector has informed my understanding of the population. I do not intend to argue against this point or claim complete objectivity. Instead I claim that through the use of reflexivity and transparency throughout the research process it is a valid compilation of women's experiences of the homeless sector and therefore adds to knowledge in this field.

Furthermore, I argue that my previous experience was of benefit, from seeking relevant literature and the choice of methods, through to conducting the investigation. My knowledge of existing services, together with the relationships built with service providers enabled me to gain access and information more quickly and easily than an outsider or researcher unknown in the field may have achieved.

As argued in Chapter 2 I found little in the literature that emulates this thesis in the academic arena. Significant proportions of the literature is specific to an area of women's homelessness such as domestic violence, health or mothers. The research that investigates single homeless women tends to focus on their identity and use of public spaces. However, due to the focus on homelessness at a political and societal level there has been more recent research conducted through government agencies - although mainly quantitative - and commissioned through

homeless charities. I was able through my awareness of such research, particularly that relevant to services to access this and use this grey literature to further my knowledge.

As explained in the reflexive account below my practitioner and researcher roles differed, but the experience I had gained did prove useful. Within my practitioner roles I was expected to assess and gain knowledge of the needs and history of homeless individuals. This gave me experience of working with vulnerable clients and an understanding of the issues they face, listening skills to support me hearing difficult circumstances and minimising my own reactions, the ability to gauge risk and awareness of the subtle clues demonstrating the effect of the conversation and overall mood. This tacit level of understanding helped to build the relationships necessary in an exploration of experiences. It also informed my understanding of some of the methods used to encourage individuals to share personal information and gave me training in these methods. Through their application I was able to provide an environment sensitive to the needs and feelings of the women involved whilst also promoting an open and honest involvement.

Birch and Miller (2000) argue that supporting people to produce narratives is a reflexive act and that 'the researcher may become the catalyst for revisiting very private and/or unhappy experiences' which can lead to greater understanding of their circumstances or histories (p189). Shapiro and Ross (2002) also argue the use of narratives to uncover important messages about how individuals view the world which could include topics such as relationships, homelessness and gender. They believe that narratives offer a unique opportunity to find out where these views have been established and to question their existence whilst increasing insight into their own circumstances. This experience whilst being positive can also be very difficult for the individual and how I managed this is discussed later in the discussion on ethics.

Dubois (1985) describes the aims of research as being to discover the 'actual facts' of people's lived experience. This philosophy is one that I have endeavoured to adopt in this research; to uncover the reality of homeless women's experiences of the services they use. Dubois also highlights that these facts may have 'been hidden, inaccessible, suppressed, distorted, misunderstood, ignored' and therefore difficult to revisit (cited in Bergen, 1993: 200). As a researcher it is my duty to ensure that the process of research does not increase or create

distress for its participants (Liamputtong, 2007: 27). Data collection was therefore a crucial stage for the research, me and the participant. Moore and Miller (1999) discuss methods that can be adopted for use with vulnerable participants to reduce the probability of distress. Strategies such as being aware of the environment in which an interview takes place and ensuring that it is quiet and private, being aware of the interviewer's manner and establishing a supportive and non-confrontational approach, being aware of the length and time of the interview and allowing the participant to have a choice in this. Furthermore, they felt that should these protective practices be adopted the ability to attract additional study participants is enhanced (p1036). I attempted to address each of these points.

In addition to remaining aware of the conduct used throughout the research process it is important to be aware of the methods used to retrieve data. It is argued that innovative and creative approaches are better to be used for researching vulnerable people so that sensitivity to the topic and participant can be maintained (Liamputtong, 2007: 161). Creative methods operate as a 'constructivist tool' which may assist research participants in recounting and relating their experiences as well as giving them meaning. It has further been argued that creative methods improve on traditional research methods due to their ability to engage participants and include them in the interpretation of the data (Veale, 2005: 254). As Paradis points out homeless women are already vulnerable in society and any research in this area could add to the stereotype and further discrimination (cited in Liamputtong: 27). For homeless women to be engaged in the research and its interpretation is therefore not only acting transparently and honestly but responsibly as a researcher.

Through keeping as true to the women's words as possible, using mixed methods, guidance of best practice and being as honest as I can about my position I have endeavoured to ensure the reader can gain the perspective of the women so necessary in informing their experiences and needs using the principles of narrative research methodology.

3.2.1 Impact of my position within the research

In the beginning I could only see the benefits of my experience on the research, my existing knowledge of the city in which the research is based, my existing knowledge of single homeless women and my existing knowledge of service provision and legislation. I had considered the skills that I could transfer, an ability and training to communicate with a homeless population, to speak a language they and services understood, an ability to move quickly and have 'insider knowledge' and an understanding of what it is like to be female. I had considered only how these roles could merge and not where and how they may separate. I had not considered that research on its own does not generate change, nor does it directly help those being researched, it instead asks and, in my now broader experience, generates questions about them. This is not to say that my role as a researcher has any less value than I first considered, I am merely highlighting the differences between my expectations and my findings.

As a practitioner I was in a position of authority. For example, when working with homeless young offenders I reported back to offender managers about their progress, attendance and action to be taken. The information I gave was reflected in court reports and decisions made about the suitability of certain programmes or whether a custodial sentence maybe more appropriate. Often, I would stand in court and report to magistrates and judges about the behaviour I had witnessed and the attitude of the young person. What I said mattered and made a difference directly for that young person. The young person's behaviour in my company, the information they gave me and the ways in which we communicated were therefore all dictated by their knowledge that I had the power to make a difference, and potentially change their lives in a negative or positive way. This has been the same in all my roles as a practitioner, I have had the ability to create and deny something for the people with whom I have worked. I therefore I have had the power. This power imbalance in my relationship with 'clients' and 'service users' continues and will always continue in my work with vulnerable people. My role, as much there to support an individual, and perhaps with the best of intentions, will always have an agenda. I must always report to someone.

As cold and as unfair as this may seem the individuals I have supported have also had their own agenda in working with me. They have been able to – or have hoped to - receive something from me, advice and knowledge, support, a word in the right ear to the right person, somebody to chase them and remind them of appointments, someone to physically take them where they need to be. The relationship that is built is not one sided, but I do have the power and the final say. This has often helped me in my work, I have been able to use this position to elicit information I need to complete my job and 'help' the individual when they may not have been able to recognise a need. I have been able to calm situations with the threat of repercussions; I have been able to feel safe in my work with the knowledge that if I am hurt there are consequences. There are of course policies and procedures to protect individuals working with people like me but there have also been many stories of professionals who breach their position of trust.

As a researcher, this power imbalance changed. There were not quite so many immediate rewards for participants, but in the same way I did not pose the same threat, what I said would not have quite the same impact for them. I had less power, but, the power imbalance did remain.

My previous experience of being a homeless practitioner meant that I began this research with pre conceived ideas about the population this research refers to and the conditions they may experience. This position is something I was acutely aware of. Rather than ignore or attempt to deny this I decided that transparency throughout the research would better ensure the validity of the findings and furthermore contextualise them for the reader. On reflection, and as I have explained in the first part of this section, I believe that my insider knowledge and in particular, previously developed relationships with services has aided the completion of this research, it made it far easier to gain access to services and therefore single homeless women and avoided extending an already lengthy process. With the women I was careful not to portray any false image of myself and in fact this position supported my ability to converse with the women, making me able to demonstrate sensitivity and sensibility to the participants whilst it prepared me for some of the experiences they may share. It also guided my reactions to ethical concerns so that they could be managed appropriately, and I feel made me more aware of my position as a researcher.

Despite these positives there is no denying that it did impact on the findings; at times I would even admit it influenced the information that was shared. Much of this was because of the assumed knowledge. Services, and women, assumed there were certain things I knew. During both data collection phases services, individuals and situations were referred to with the assumption that I knew of them. This was evident by either a reference to a service or a person by an abbreviated name or nickname or by starting a sentence 'you know when' or 'do you remember'. This is true when speaking to professionals working in services whom I had never met, but more surprisingly it was true when speaking to women who had never met or known me in that capacity – knowing I had previously worked in the homeless community was enough.

The consequences of these assumptions are hard to know for sure but I believe them to be both positive and negative. Negatively it could mean that there were things women did not want me to know in case I perhaps told somebody working with them – despite them being informed of confidentiality. Positively it could mean that both services and women were willing to share more as they may believe I had a greater understanding, I may know it anyway, or perhaps even that I could help.

Furthermore, as described in the reflexive account above my 'insider/outsider' status raises important questions. Firstly there is the question of whether I was viewed by the participants as an insider – or indeed an outsider. Due to my previous practitioner status I had gained knowledge about homelessness in the city in which the research is based and had an understanding of the services on offer. I knew of the current political and local policy and structural changes. I am also a woman, I am white, raised in the same city as many of the women, and during my doctoral studies became a mother. Perhaps then I was an insider. But I have never been homeless, never relied on anyone but parents to provide a home, and a home by traditional definition it was, and rely I could. I had only ever claimed benefits temporarily and even then for 'spending money' rather than to pay bills. I didn't worry that I would raise a child on my own or not be able to provide. I have a strong security network. Also I had mainly worked with homeless men. Therefore I was an outsider. I had an understanding of the homeless culture gained from working closely with those within it. I however, had never been a part of it, therefore I was an insider *and* an outsider and throughout the data collection process with different participants and as relationships developed this position 'shifted' (Merriam et al, 2010). The way in which women related to me, and in turn to the research, therefore cannot be assumed due to my previous links, for example neither Jackie, Christine or Kelly were from the same city and, it could be argued, we had less of shared understanding for the place the research is based and the recent changes within homeless services.

As explored above there was a definite 'shared language' and assumption of knowledge apparent in the data from both the women and professionals working within services. It could be expected that professionals who participated in the study maybe saw me more as an 'insider' than the women whose narratives are included in Chapter 5 because of our shared experiences; but for all participants being a woman researching female homelessness was also important. An expectation of understanding the vulnerabilities of women, discussions around menstruation and the complications created by being street homeless and also the expectation for me to understand the desire to be close to family can be heard throughout the narratives. Shared language and understanding is not apparent in the narratives however, in the discussions around personal experiences of drug or alcohol use, nor abuse. A sign that there were expectations I had not experienced these.

The second important question raised by my 'insider/outsider status' was the issue of power. Literature around the balance of power within research and acknowledgement that power for the researcher exists and influences data is commonplace within feminist literature (Oakley, 1981, Cotterrill and Letherby, 1993 and Popaduik, 2004). Despite a conscious attempt to address the power balance in the choice of methods, discussed further in the next section, it cannot be ignored that my researcher status and previous occupation placed me in a position of power. Firstly the ways in which my practitioner status supported the development of this research – from an understanding of interviewing, access to services, knowledge of participants are all elements of 'power'. The power for participants lay in the information they had, and what they chose to share. As you will read, I tried to reduce the power I had in accessing female homeless participants through recruiting them without the support of organisations, however this proved difficult. The textbox below also demonstrates how I made efforts to empower participants when we met and how this not only made me feel but effected my perspective of my status.

I invited women to ask questions about me and the research, and I told them I would be honest if there were questions I didn't want to answer. This is a different approach to being a practitioner where my life had always been off limits and at the very most need to know. I felt uneasy and nervous that I would lose my 'professional' façade and that I may give too much away. I was worried that the women may ask something really personal that I would find difficult to avoid and that the information might get shared with ex and future clients. I was worried that I was abandoning all the skills that I had developed and I was making myself vulnerable for the sake of building a relationship I had found easy to build before. As it happened the women didn't ask me anything too uncomfortable – had I ever been homeless? Was I married (I wore a ring anyway so many of them knew the answer)? What would I get out of the research? Didn't they know me from somewhere?

Using both my professional and personal personas in these encounters allowed me the freedom to have more subjective conversations with the women I was talking with. I found myself expressing empathy far more freely and agreeing with women when they talked about how negative some experiences had been. As a professional a more objective view may have been taken, but I enjoyed these more honest encounters, the ability to agree or disagree more freely, to share not only knowledge and fact but also experiences and feelings. I also found the trusting relationships came quite easily from there, the women could see why I wanted to complete the research, they believed me when I said I wanted to help and some therefore were happy to let me.

Merriam et al (2010) talk about how participants within their research projects have asserted their power, from having others accompany them to dismissing questions they are asked. It was apparent that for some of the participants within this thesis they used their insider knowledge, choice to talk within a familiar environment and in some cases prior knowledge of me to assert their power and control of the narrative – using stories to raise awareness of their standards, to engage me and using humour to establish a more equal relationship. One particular story shared was of a time during a period of sofa surfing one of the women witnessed the owner of the home urinate in a cooking pan. The story was told whilst laughing and with lengthy description of her position at the time – cutting her partners hair – the demonstration of her shock and reaction and finished with her absolute refusal to stay in the residence even though her options were hugely limited.

Aiello and Nero (2019) talk about their need to use 'moment-by-moment discourse moves' during their experiences of research within schools in their own communities. Throughout the data collection I proceeded to change my position, language and presentation based on what was being said or happening within the interviews. For example, starting the interviews in a professional manner by explaining the format of the data collection, running through the formalities of confidentiality and then switching to portray empathy and support if a difficult subject was being discussed or a frustration with policy was being shared. Thus changing both my status and power levels throughout. I further used discourse to help reduce hierarchy within the relationship by being clear in every 'mode' that I wanted to hear their own stories, concerns and experiences encouraging participants to speak as freely as they wished.

It is apparent though that knowing more about this relationship of practitioner/researcher or insider/outsider would allow for the reader to know far more about the environmental influences of the inquiry and enrich the findings even further. Therefore I believe further investigation of this type is important to aid our understanding and support research where the researcher is known to the community.

One of the ways in which I attempted to reduce my impact on the research was through the methods I used, these will be discussed in the following section.

3.3 Methods

Mixed qualitative methods were used to be able to build a picture of women's experiences of homeless services within the context of the national welfare reform and current changes to homeless provision in the city in which the research is based. Together the data collected formed a detailed narrative detailing the woman's movement into, out of and through homeless services. Unlike some previous larger scale studies (Crisis, 2006) this research considered any service that is frequented by homeless women not just those commissioned to work with them. This included young people's accommodation, health services, voluntary organisations, day centres, drop-in meetings, council offices and hostels.

Credit for creating the status of narrative as a method is often given to Bruner (Bamberg, 2012 and Polkinghorne, 1995). Bruner argued that a narrative mode of thought could be used in two different ways. Firstly to analyse narratives themselves searching for classic groupings and to identify themes, and secondly, to make sense of people's lives through ordering experience. Both approaches were used within this research to ensure that women's experiences were thoroughly investigated and understood.

The research process began by using the second approach known as 'narrative analysis'. During narrative analysis stories are created through focusing on what has occurred and the participation and connection of human involvement in the specific events, they are then ordered creating something similar to case studies or biographies (8: Bamberg, 2012). Polkinghorne refers to this process as 'the use of emplotment and narrative configuration as its primary analytic tool' (6: 1995).

The process of narrative analysis therefore differs to most other forms of analysis in that it brings together significant information rather than separating it from the main body of data. This study draws upon Dollard's (1935) seven steps for forming a life history or developing a narrative as suggested by Polkinghorne as a useful method of narrative analysis (16:1995).

Step 1: To gather the cultural context in which events occurred. For example where they happened and what was going on there at that time. To acknowledge the values and rules of that society and consider which of these factors may have affected the story?

Step 2: To understand the nature of the individual at the centre of the story. To consider their sex, height, physique, intelligence, health, etc. Within the framework of the story did their age and stage of development affect the outcome or their self-identity?

Step 3: To explore the relationships often influencing heavily the actions of individuals. What were the relationships – with family, friends, and professionals - of this person at the time of events? Did things happen because of somebody else or them?

Step 4: To discover the choices and actions of the central person and how they view the world. What are their motivations? What is their emotional state at the time? The researcher must describe the interaction between person and setting.

Step 5: To frame the story in terms of the person's history and past experiences, considering how they might have impacted. How have they been limited/supported by their past experiences?

Step 6: To generate the story. All stories have a beginning, middle and an end; this should be no different but be within a specific context. The story must contain enough detail so that the reader can know the individual. Look out for negative case analysis.

Step 7: The story must be a 'meaningful explanation of [persons] responses and actions'. As the story will start with the end e.g. knowing the person ended up using homeless services the purpose is to tell the story of what led to that outcome.

To build the narrative four different approaches were used. An extensive literature review was carried out to establish the findings of previous research into how women experience homelessness and use services. This also included an investigation in to the current changes to the welfare state and expected changes to the homeless services in the city. Next a mapping study took place involving interviewing services to contextualise information gathered from single homeless women at a later stage. Creative methods were then used with the female participants who used the homeless services to produce a timeline visually depicting their use of services, including the frequency, how they were accessed, and length of time they were engaged and order of use. Using the timeline to support individual's semi-structured interviews then established the women's understanding using the timeline as a discussion point. These interviews hoped to uncover less tangible facts regarding their experiences such

as hopes and fears. Finally summaries of these interviews and the timeline were discussed with the women to ensure that they agreed with the information and understanding of the researcher and to allow them the chance to review their journeys and understand them better. **Figure 1** demonstrates more visually the flow of the research.

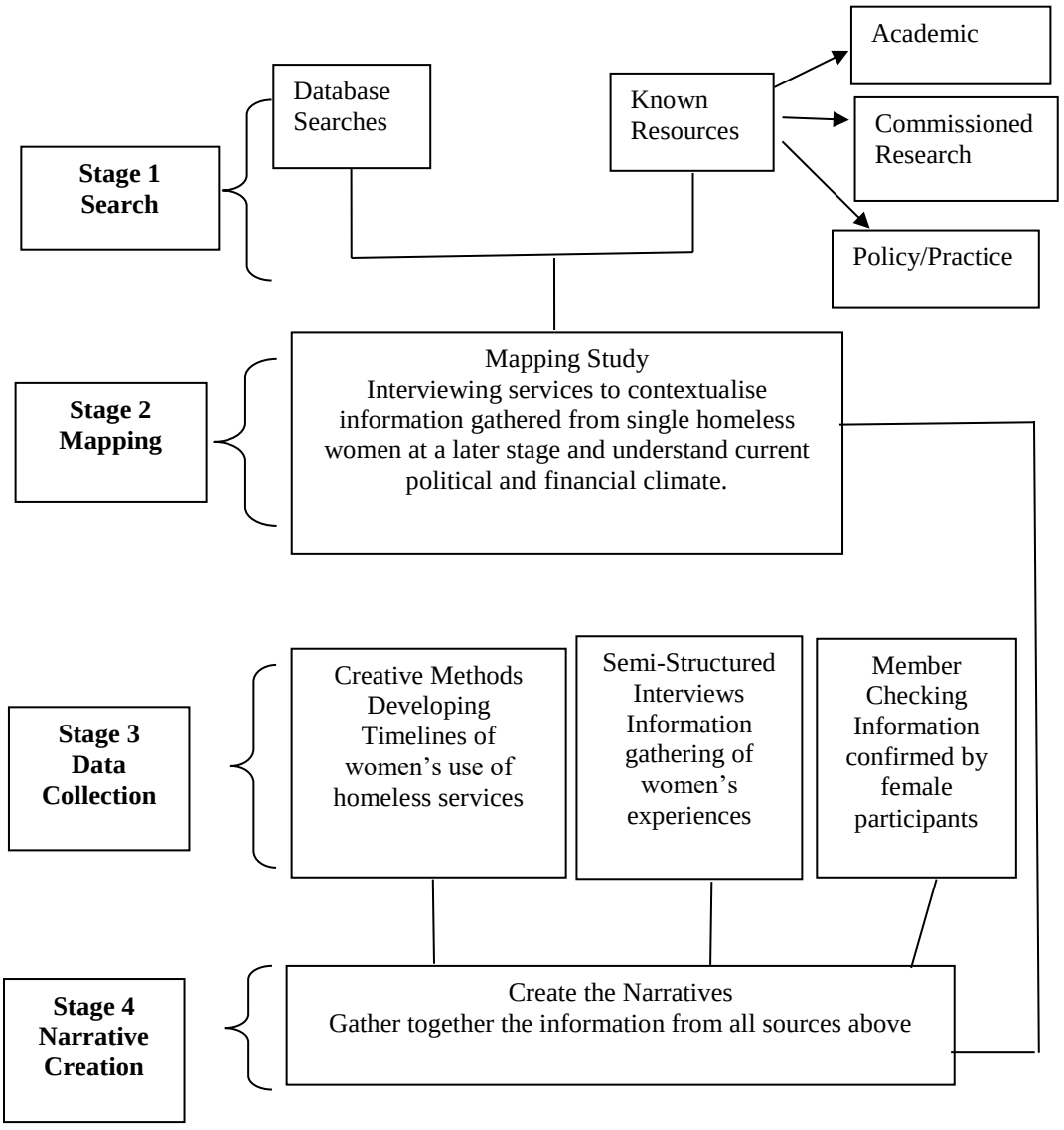

Figure 1.

In the next section a description of each approach and how and why they were used will be delivered. Ensuring that the research is well-defined and there is a clear agenda of how answers are to be achieved is 'in keeping with the feminist agenda in which researchers attempt to consciously acknowledge and minimise power differences by maintaining an

openness and vulnerability about oneself' (398: Popaduik, 2004). Furthermore, a detailed description of the investigation provides context for the reader and additional understanding.

3.3.1 Literature Review

Andrews, Squire and Tamboukou (2013) state that 'most biographical and life history researchers accept that social formations shape personal stories…and 'read' the significance of social change in those stories' (p7). The research began with a review of the literature addressing women's homelessness including their experiences, causes, routes into and out of and their use of services. Literature addressing the major impacts on female homelessness such as finances and employment was then considered. Further literature was read and information gathered regarding the welfare reform and political and financial changes affecting the homeless sector throughout the UK giving understanding to the changes afoot and the impact already identified. This places the research as a whole into a wider context ensuring relevance of the study beyond its place of investigation. Key texts were identified and used to provide an insight into the current landscape of female homeless research and homeless women. This information is provided within Chapter 2.

3.3.2 Service Perspective – the 'mapping study'

The second stage of this methodology was to complete a mapping study of the services available for homeless people within the city. The purpose of the mapping study was to survey, examine and document the type of organisations, the methods used, how they are accessed, the number of women they support and their view on the issue of female homelessness in the city they are based. The mapping study had a strong empirical focus, providing data and other information, including funding streams, changes to the service both recent and expected, and their relationships with other services in the city.

3.3.2.1 Why conduct a mapping study?

This research on which this thesis is based was conducted within a period of significant political and economic change in the UK. Within my literature review I presented evidence that services were being adversely affected by the austerity measures being taken by a new coalition and conservative government. Reductions in budgets effected staffing numbers, staff morale and restricted the support services could offer (Survey of Needs and Provision, 2013). Furthermore the same survey identified that many services for the homeless population were

being closed altogether having a negative knock-on effect to services and their users, notably the women I aimed to include in this study.

The findings of the mapping study demonstrate the impact of such measures on homeless services in one city in time and place in context data collected with homeless females that were later interviewed. Furthermore as this research hoped to uncover the relationship between homeless women and services it was important to be familiar with and understand their situations, restrictions and place within the city. The best way to gain this understanding was to talk to the service providers.

In addition this mapping study provided an opportunity to build a relationship with homeless services in the city that proved conducive to conducting the research with single homeless women themselves. The intention to recruit single homeless women individually rather than asking a third party such as the services to support this recruitment or make recommendations came from a desire for their participation to be truly voluntary, however, as this has been explained this proved difficult. In case of this I knew there may be a need to access the services that the women used, and in some circumstances lived, to identify women using homeless services. This access provided a degree of certainty for finding women using homeless services in these locations and also resulted in providing a research environment familiar to the single homeless female participants. Furthermore, I found that single homeless women's willingness to participate increased with the knowledge that the research would take place within an environment they already accessed and the disruption on their lives would be minimised. It was also felt that the opportunity for women to be open about their experiences was maximised.

3.3.2.2 Participants

I decided to refer to professionals working in homeless services and single homeless women that took part in this research as participants within the thesis as I wanted to emphasise their participation and the active role women had in the construction of their own stories and acknowledge the care taken with all their narratives.

The range of services was specifically chosen to ensure that a variety of relationships and engagement with homeless women could be included. The wide range also allowed inclusion

of organisations funded differently, with different staffing numbers and ratios, different recording systems and with a variety of aims and objectives. Services were identified through previous knowledge, word of mouth and electronic media. Services identified through previous relationships, sustained in my career supporting vulnerable people, were asked for information on new services or niche services that I may not have had previous contact with.

Not all services within the city that offered support for homeless women are included here, some of the services that were approached were cautious about being included in the study for varying reasons, some were concerned about the amount of time participation may take and it was apparent that others were concerned about how they may be portrayed in this final report despite assurances made to services that they would remain anonymous.

The types of services available to single homeless women in the city included accommodation services, floating support services, day centres, drug and alcohol services, health services and specialist services, for example, those engaging with sex workers or mental ill health. It should be made clear here that not all of these services worked explicitly with homeless people although all had client groups that included the homeless. Table 1 shows in more detail the different types of services existing for single homeless women in the city. The table demonstrates that not only are there more services largely for men, but that only one service is specifically for women and that this service is restricted to sex workers. Furthermore in the accommodation designated to single homeless people only five in over 300 beds were allowed for women and none at all were available specifically to female offenders in the city.

It was also observed that as with the population of this Midlands City the client group using homeless services was diverse in terms of ethnicity, disability, age and even social class. Despite this however, although there were homeless services offering specialist support to those with mental ill health or classed as 'young people' there were no separate services for those with physical disabilities or specific cultural needs, thus highlighting further the homogenous nature of homeless service provision.

Some of the 22 services identified were managed by the same organisation, for example one organisation ran accommodation services for men and women, floating support in the

community for four separate groups and young people's accommodation. This therefore narrowed down contactable services to 16.

Type of Service	Number of services in the City	For Women	For Men
Homeless Accommodation for single people – over 300 beds	2	Yes	Yes
Floating Support Services	2	Yes	Yes
Residential Accommodation for those displaying Mental Ill Health	1	Yes	Yes
Young People's Accommodation Services	3	Yes	Yes
Health Services	1	Yes	Yes
Day Centres	1	Yes	Yes
Drug and Alcohol Services for adults	1	Yes	Yes
Offender hostel	3	No	Yes
A working community with accommodation	1	Yes	Yes
Drug and Alcohol Services for young people	1	Yes	Yes
Supported accommodation in the community	1	Yes – 16 beds	Yes – over 50 beds
Services for 'sex working women'	1	Yes	No
Other Support	3	Yes	Yes
Total	22	18	21

Table 1. Services for homeless women in the city the research is based

3.3.2.3 Acquiring ethical approval

Prior to any meetings with services the requirements of the Research Ethics Committee were met and full ethical approval was sought. An explanation of the purpose, methods, rationale and safeguarding procedures for the participants and their information were submitted. A participation information leaflet (Appendix 1), health and safety assessment and consent form (Appendix 2) that were later presented to participants were also designed.

To ensure the research was approved the methods to be used to safe-guard participants and support them throughout the process were demonstrated. These included a commitment to being open and congruent with participants throughout the process, offering confidentiality to their information and involvement, providing supportive information if required and addressing ethical issues with integrity and professionalism (Moore and Miller, 1999). The consent form demonstrates an intention to and an explanation of how consent would be obtained from participants prior to their engagement (see appendix 2). The participant information leaflet evidenced that participants would be fully informed of my role, their role and what would happen to the information they gave me (see appendix 1). The participation information leaflet also provided an opportunity to explain the research in greater depth and gave the participant information to digest on their own and an opportunity therefore to reconsider engagement.

Concerns were expressed by some of the services about how they would be identified in the final research and what information I was hoping to illicit in my research with single homeless women. Although it was never made explicit it was felt this was because they were concerned that my thesis may undermine their service. It was explained that services would not be identified by name and instead numbers would be used, the aim of the research - to provide recommendations and not to be critical of services- was also reiterated to provide reassurance. The literature indicated that organisations used in research may want to influence the presentation of findings in a final report. Lee (1993) talks about how some organisations may want to restrict either the methodological choices of the researcher or the published product (p125). The methodological choices of the second stage of this research to be completed with single homeless women were therefore explained at this stage to services to ensure that these would not later be questioned. This also provided an opportunity to use the service providers professional experience to advise on their suitability.

3.3.2.4 Recruitment

The 16 organisations that had been identified as working with single homeless women were contacted via email and telephone to explain briefly the research aims and objectives and to ask if they would be willing to participate in an initial interview. Ten services responded willing to participate in the study. The reasons for not participating amongst the other six varied from

no contact received, time constraints and being a brand new service with no real presence in the city at the time.

The 10 services included in the mapping study consisted of -:

- one young person's accommodation project
- two mixed accommodation projects both with a different ethos
- one organisation offering women's only accommodation and floating support
- one mental health accommodation provider
- one health centre for the homeless
- one day centre
- one provider of food to those in need
- one service working with street workers in the city

The participant information sheets and consent forms along with the list of framing questions were sent to each organisation willing to participate. Questions were initially requested by one of the organisations as they felt this would prepare them and enable them to acquire any specific data required. This was particularly useful when services were questioned about how many women they had supported in a particular time frame. It was explained to services however that I expected these questions to frame the interview rather than provide a strict agenda and that meetings would be using a semi-structured format meaning other information would be welcome and maybe requested. The questions had been previously submitted along with my intended methods to the ethics committee and had been approved.

Some of the services had felt it would be more beneficial for me to speak with the staff member that worked with the women who used them, which meant I did not speak to the equivalent member of staff at each service. This meant that in one of the interviews information regarding funding and strategic changes had to be gathered through another source but overwhelmingly meant that the staff I spoke to were knowledgeable about the experiences of women and passionate about improving services for them.

One service proved more difficult to access than the other nine organisations. The service in question was central to the homeless journey and to other homeless services; it was therefore an integral service to support single homeless women and it seemed paramount that I speak

with them. Contact was attempted via phone and email initially as with the other services. The first challenge was to seek the appropriate person to contact due to the size of the service and the variety of services offered through them this took some time and required many 'initial' emails being sent to the wrong person and referrals to 'somebody who may be able to help'. Once the correct person had been found there were difficulties in obtaining a response to both emails and telephone calls.

This challenge coincided with a time of publicity surrounding the research and support being gained within the city. Contact established with council leaders provided a platform to share frustrations and seek advice. The support shown to the research meant that they were able to request written feedback from this particular service answering some of the questions submitted and instigated a dialogue allowing access to the service and completion of the interview. This experience demonstrated the complexity of 'layers' that many social researchers have to permeate before reaching the target population.

3.3.2.5 Materials

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with one member of staff from each service and recorded. Staff who worked within these services had received varying degrees of training, from volunteers (who may or may not have received other types of training in different roles) to health professionals such as GP's who had undertaken many years of specialist training. This differentiation allowed for a wide variety of responses including guarded and professional and open and passionate. The interviews took place within each service to ensure participation was maximised and made as easy as possible. Interviews enquired about their work, funding, experience and what, if any, previous research they have used as a basis for good practice or have conducted themselves. Framing questions used in these interviews can be found in Appendix 3. Interviewees were made aware that participation would be voluntary and they could withdraw from the project at any point they wished up until the production of the final thesis.

There were two reasons for using semi-structured interviews with services, firstly to practice interview techniques that would be used with women and secondly to start to build the relationship with individual staff members. Semi-structured interviews were agreed upon for a method of data collection with women as they fitted my methodological choices and would

allow for the data needed in the analysis process. Newton (2010) states that 'a useful concept in describing types of interview is the continuum; any particular interview can be placed somewhere between 'unstructured' and 'structured'. The 'unstructured' pole is closer to observation, while the 'structured' use of 'closed' questions is similar to types of questionnaire' (p1).

There has been criticism levied previously at 'interview-obtained transcripts' that argued that they are restrictive and their analysis is solely based on the desires and experience of the researcher (9: Andrews, Squire and Tamboukou, 2013). However, interviews also allow for a greater understanding of the experiences of participants, through the building of a relationship and the provision of context. Semi-structured interviews allow for flexibility within the interview process. There is a general structure within semi-structured interviews, such as a starting question or guidance on the topic to be discussed but a detailed interview structure is not known until during the interview. Participants were therefore given freedom to decide how much they said and how they said it. Furthermore I wanted this research to allow, where possible, the women participants to feel empowered to have a voice through research. Semi-structured interviews allowed me to gather these voices and through the analysis of the data I ensured the voices were represented.

It could be argued that conducting these interviews took a huge amount of time that was unnecessary due to the fact that some of the information gained about the services was available in other formats. However, it proved incredibly important in gaining a deeper knowledge and an inside perspective to each of the organisations that may have been used by single homeless women. The interviews also helped to introduce 'me' to and build relationships with the services at an early stage, a relationship that was then maintained and utilised throughout the research process. This was particularly invaluable when placed into context with the changes that the services were experiencing.

3.3.2.6 Data Collection

All of the interviews took place at the work places of the interviewees in private rooms either generally used for offices or reserved for key working or consultation. All participants at this stage agreed to be recorded. Due to their daily usage rooms had been arranged and decorated to encourage people to talk and feel non-threatened. The rooms were all neutral, offering

comfortable chairs and privacy. None of the participants showed me to a room with a desk between us and seemed to want me to also feel comfortable and at ease.

Two of the interview rooms however held distractions; one used an interview with large windows on all sides that were not covered, so that although we could not be heard we could be seen and see everything that was happening outside of the room at all times. This proved distracting when service users were coming in and out of the venue. The other was in an office next door to a room being used to hold a popular mother and toddler morning, which inevitably resulted in a lot of noise emanating from it. Staff members who spoke with me appeared comfortable in doing so and again repeated their agreement and enthusiasm for the topic of the research. Completing this mapping study successfully gave me a broader understanding of the landscape in which the women live; it also reaffirmed my dual role – in the eyes of the participants – as a researcher and practitioner.

3.3.3 Single homeless women

The third stage of the research was with single homeless women themselves. May et al (2007) argued that research into homelessness 'paints a picture of the struggle for urban space as one faced mainly if not wholly by homeless men' (p3). The rationale for focusing this research on the single female homeless population has been presented in Chapter 2 which demonstrates that female homelessness is under researched as a field and that within the relatively small amount – particularly compared to male homelessness – of research none focuses on women's experiences of homeless services in the context of the current financial and political climate.

This thesis is concerned with exploring the lived experience of single homeless women and how they understand, view and make sense of this experience. The population of interest were women who were using homeless specific services or whom were homeless and using services equipped to work with the homeless population. Every effort was made to be as inclusive as possible for single homeless women, different recruitment strategies and locations were considered (and are detailed in this chapter) however, as is demonstrated in the following section, the participants remain a relatively homogenous group in terms of ethnicity and sexuality. The reason for this was simply that the women who offered to participate were white and heterosexual in the main. Additionally, difficulties in recruitment meant that

'choosing' or declining participants based on their ethnicity or sexuality in an effort to research a more diverse population was not possible.

All of the participants were allowed residency in the UK and either still engaged with homeless services or had used them in the last six months. The research focused on single homeless women who were legislatively equal to single homeless men of the same age, yet for whom provision was substantially less in the city in which the research was based; a point reiterated throughout the literature suggesting that this is an issue reaching beyond its location. Single women were chosen due to their differentiation in terms of housing legislation to those women with children or in a couple. In this thesis 'single homeless women' were classified as such if they have no dependants or did not have care of them at the time of the interview, if they were not accommodated with a partner/looking to be accommodated with a partner and were accessing the service as a single female.

The research on which this thesis is based included only adult females. This in general terms meant women over the age of 18; however it would also exclude any care leavers perhaps over these ages who were still receiving additional support for housing issues. This decision was taken again to ensure that all the women included in the study were legally entitled to the same provision through local and national housing legislation. Under 18's would be supported by Social Care and offered a homeless duty solely on their age. This is not true over the age of 18. A homeless duty would also be offered to females homeless due to domestic abuse, the decision was therefore taken to not recruit women living in refuges in a bid to form a homogenous group of research participants.

3.3.3.1 Participants

Smith et al (2009) argues between four and 10 participant interviews permit an appropriate level analysis for a clinical thesis. This research recruited eight participants.

The eight participants were recruited as all were considered 'single' in legislative terms (non-married, not living together nor seeking accommodation together), all were aged over 18 and therefore could legally be deemed an 'adult' and all fit the definition being used by the research on which this thesis is based and which is outlined in Chapter 1 and discussed further in Chapter 2 – 'to have no access to accommodation of their own that they can legally and/or

safely occupy'. These characteristics were established through speaking with the women but were often backed up by awareness of the services they had used or were using. Despite these shared characteristics however, all eight women had very different needs, experiences and histories.

Out of the eight women spoken to seven were white British. One was from a travelling community and would class herself as white Irish. Five were currently homeless, the other three had had recent experiences of homelessness and two of those were facing homelessness again in the near future due to expected eviction. These three women continued to use services for the homeless and the two facing eviction relied on the support of this service to help them in their current predicament .Four of the women were mothers with adult children, one had two young children both of whom had been adopted by other families – and one of these was very recent, one had no children and it is unknown about the other two. For those who were mothers this was central to their perception of the circumstances they were in and it became clear that for these six women instability in their lives had occurred when their children were young. As they shared their experiences and an insight to their lives it also became apparent that those still in contact with their children knew that they were now facing difficulties in their housing situation. For one this included her daughter using the same services as her.

The women's own narratives show their histories are extremely diverse. As previously revealed one of the women came from a travelling community but had lived what she described as a 'settled' life for many years, by this she meant not living on travelling sites. This settled life had occurred due to the domestic violence she experienced in the travelling community and the expectations of her role as a wife within this community. Leaving this community and her husband had led her to have to move around the country for the past few years so that she would not be found. She arrived in this Midlands city only a few months before to flee her ex-husband yet again using an alias so that it would be even harder to find her.

Another of the women was highlighted by the others due to the 'posh' accent she had. It was explained by her that she had lived in a very affluent area and had had a very privileged existence prior to her homelessness. She had previously been married to a man with a very good job and worked herself allowing her to purchase and own an expensive house, car and

footwear! When this relationship broke down a lot of this was lost and sold and she had ended up homeless.

Seven of the women felt they came from supportive families and revealed the support they had received from their families over the years and none seemed to hold any grievances or negative opinions about them. This would seem to contradict popular opinion in which families are not supportive, do not care or are so chaotic themselves they could not possibly help. In conjunction with this all of them discussed the fact that their desires were to be able to have a home in which they could have family visit and they could support their families from.
Five of the women used alcohol currently on a daily basis. Another of the women had done so previously. Two of the women currently used drugs and three more admitted that they had been drug dependant in the past.

Due to these and other difficulties the women were facing participating in the research was not their primary concern. Therefore not all of the women completed the three different stages of the research process.

As in agreement with the ethics committee it was made clear from my first meeting with the women that they were free to withdraw from the research at any time up until the point that their information had been written into my thesis. Consent was sought at each session so that this concept of choice could be reaffirmed but also so that – as did happen – if contact was lost the information I had previously received could still be used. Ethics will be discussed in more detail in the following section.

3.3.3.2 Ethical Considerations

This second part of field research followed a similar pattern to considering ethical considerations and acquiring ethical approval as the mapping study and again was conducted within the ethical framework provided by the codes of ethics and conduct of Coventry University.

Ethical approval was sought before any attempt was made to access and speak with participants in the study. It was a priority to endeavour that all participants were voluntary and the approaches used to achieve this within this research will be discussed in this chapter. All

women were offered a full and clear explanation about the purpose of the study and what would be expected of them. Women who agreed to be involved or expressed an interest were given participation information leaflets detailing a full explanation about the research aims and methods including expected timeframes for completion. Previous experience of working with the homeless population proved invaluable in this communication and is discussed further in the reflexive account provided further in this thesis.

Women were informed they could withdraw from the study if they wished to do so at any time, this was repeated to the women every time we met so that the women knew despite consenting at an earlier stage they did not have to continue to be involved and they could retain some control over the process. The participants were also informed that all information and data was kept confidential to the research team and was anonymised. Furthermore that recordings of interviews would be downloaded and kept on a password protected computer system in line with the expectations of the Data Protection Act and Coventry University.
The women said they would feel confident in telling me they did not want to continue, and they were also given the option of informing the staff at the service they were accessing if they wished to do so. None of the women withdrew from the research by choice, although some of the women were lost before the three sessions could be completed.

Consent forms were completed and signed by all participants before any further interaction took place. The immediate impact of the research on the women and myself was addressed through the relationship that was built through the research process. An awareness of the difficult subject matter and a willingness to encourage women to voice their concerns and 'check-in' on their feelings throughout the data collection process assisted in keeping them safe. In addition interviews were not time limited, allowing for space and reducing pressure on women. The women were therefore given the space they required to complete their story or also given the freedom to finish interviews 'early' and when they saw fit. This allowed the maximum opportunity for an honest and detailed account of their experience whilst considering the participants own feeling and position. Previous experience and knowledge gained from working in the environment was used in order to provide information and guidance on supporting services to help combat the long-term effects of involvement in the research.

Consideration to my ethical responsibilities was given throughout the research process and will be discussed further in the next section.

3.3.3.3 Ethics as an ongoing process

> It was difficult not to want to use my newfound depth of knowledge to 'help'. To not highlight parts of their story that may be significant in making sense of current situations. When I began my research I wanted to use these stories in a therapeutic manner, I wanted the women to be able to reflect on their own experiences and to learn about themselves so they could have more knowledge moving forwards. I wanted to combine my previous role with my new one and do what I had always wanted to do – help people exit homelessness, for good. I felt that this information could be important in their journey and could provide a turning point or learning curve. But again, who was I to tell them which parts of their story were significant? Who am I to suggest this is where things could change? Who am I to say I have the answers?

As inferred it has been argued that being a practitioner completing research in a domain you know can result in the research not being objective or being heavily influenced, and that in being so familiar with the subject you lose 'the unique perspective of the researcher [which] inevitably makes a difference to the research' (1: Costley, 2010). The following sections will show how the method's I have used enabled me to retain the women's stories as fully possible and the chapter so far has highlighted that I make no attempt in this thesis to claim complete objectivity; instead I have provided detailed accounts of the context of the research, myself - through reflexive accounts - and the women's histories, to improve transparency of the research process and data collected producing a valid account of women's experiences of the homeless sector, interpretations of the data and recommendations for the sector as a whole. Therefore resulting in a justifiable contribution to the wider knowledge in this field.

In the previous sections I have addressed the ethical implications of applying for and achieving ethical approval for the data collection stages of the research with both the services working with single homeless women and the women themselves, the ethical implications of their recruitment and the ethical considerations throughout the data collection stages as well as the impact of my position within the research and the issues of power this provoked. This section further enables the reader to appreciate my ethical considerations that were ongoing throughout the research and how 'ethics' was an ongoing process.

Below are extracts from a recently accepted chapter in a book about the doctoral experience; the chapter, entitled 'Relational doctoral supervision: practitioner/researcher, insider/outsider and the value of reflexivity' was co-authored with my Director of Studies Dr Geraldine Brady,

written autobiographically the extracts demonstrate one of the ways in which ethical dilemmas were thought through within the research on which this thesis is based (Brady and Sherwin: upcoming, expected 2021).

The first fragment addresses the feelings I battled as a practitioner conducting research. My desire to want to 'help' the single homeless women participants posed an ethical conundrum for me, listening to their narratives and not taking steps to support them practically felt alien.

> The research journey showed me how much of a person's story I had missed as a practitioner. As a PhD researcher I heard versions of stories I would not hear as a professional. Maybe I was asking questions I would not normally ask, maybe I had time (to listen) that I did not have before. I was also able to re-listen and truly hear each woman's story, a luxury not afforded to me in my previous occupation, and in doing so I was able to identify opportunities to support that could have been missed. It was difficult not to want to use my new-found depth of knowledge to 'help'.

Discussions in supervision helped me to understand more about my role as a researcher and draw and maintain the lines between that and practitioner. This meant that I did not ignore the plights of women, signposting to services and sharing my knowledge with them, but that I was able to distinguish my role as a practitioner and explain this to the women participants.

Another unexpected reaction to the data collection process was the attachment I had to the narratives I was hearing from women, it was quite different to the attachment I had previously had to the experiences heard as a practitioner where I would have been able to 'switch off' safe in the knowledge I was offering all the support I could. I felt a greater connection to the life histories of the female participants and in turn a greater responsibility for them. Discussions about this in my supervision enabled me to share this feeling and find methods for managing both those feelings and the stories that was beneficial to the research.

> The narratives of homeless women are so powerful and their stories each so unique that it would have been hard not to hear them and not feel something. Despite being prepared for the inevitable experiences shared - bereavement, motherhood (and loss of – either through forced separation or bereavement), racism, domestic abuse - it was difficult not to feel despondent, uneasy or enraged at times. It was also difficult not to admire women who had faced so much and were still able to consider another life, to express dreams and hopes, and to share so openly all of this with a stranger.

Within this thesis (see sections 3.5.2 and 5.3.3.2.1) incidents within the data collection process that raised ethical considerations are discussed. These incidents were also shared within supervision and it became clear that as a previous practitioner the ethical challenge they presented was not always recognised immediately. The experience of managing difficult situations meant that at times I reacted in a professional manner – also an ethical manner – before considering the ethical ramifications for the research as a whole. This next fragment refers to one of these occasions.

> As a practitioner, communicating with vulnerable people, I had received training on appropriate methods, interview timings and safety concerns. This training was advantageous during data collection and I used the skills to monitor the direction of my meetings with women. For example, one particular woman was trying extremely hard to overcome addiction to heroin but this often left her relying heavily on alcohol. There were several interview appointments made with her at the first of which she was sober and able to participate, the next appointments however were either missed or, when we did meet, she had been drinking. We spoke about the fact she had had a drink and how much she had drunk and although she felt she was sober enough to complete the interview I felt that day was not the right time. I felt confident to talk with her about her addiction, what this meant for her, what she planned to do and why I felt I didn't want to record an interview with her at this time. We arranged instead for me to come back first thing in the morning, when although alcohol would have been consumed (her addiction was at the level that without it she would have been ill) her ability to consent and communicate would not have been effected.
>
> During supervision I spoke of some of the issues I had had in completing the interviews, including with this participant. The team were able to help me see how, although my reaction was in some way innate, my thought process and appropriate action was in fact incredibly important for the research, me and the participant. Geraldine highlighted how not all doctoral students would recognise that this may have impacted on her capacity to consent, as long as the participant had confirmed that she was OK, or may have felt obliged to continue with the arrangement. I had not recognised this as an ethical and moral issue to be considered, I simply took the action that I would have taken as a practitioner. In addition this insight, along with encouragement of reflexivity, inspired me to include these scenarios and circumstances, crucial to the data collection process and in depicting the complexity of women's lives.

As a researcher my reactions as a practitioner presented the challenge of ensuring the data collected remained unaffected and that vital details had not been missed, which they may have been had this woman not attended another interview. The question of acting ethically however was entirely more important to me as both a practitioner and a researcher. Building a relationship with research participants so that these concerns can be discussed and/or addressed rather than avoided or missed enabled me to continue the data collection process in this case, but supervision enabled me to view ethical considerations in another light.

> With hindsight and an increased understanding of how my roles merge and separate I am able to see how having experience and a passion in the field in which you plan to research supports and inspires you as a doctoral student to keep moving forward. However, the advice and guidance available during supervision are fundamental in ensuring that the lines, although blurry at times, are not erased. To use this support is central to being able to develop perspectives more far reaching than those gained in practice and to be able to recognise the contribution to knowledge which will benefit the field of research and practice.

Recruitment of single homeless women was another area in which I endeavoured to work ethically and reduce any coercion into participation. This will be explained further in the next section.

3.3.3.4 Recruitment

Fieldwork with single homeless women began in June 2014. Once ethical approval was received recruitment of females participants began. The intention to ask the women to volunteer rather than to recruit women through recommendations from services had previously been expressed to services in the mapping study. Many of the services spoken with expressed concern that this would prove difficult. They felt that due to the many conflicting issues women were addressing and managing in their lives, to volunteer for research was not on their agenda. They therefore felt that the women may require some encouragement or even suggestion. However, in a bid to persist with this voluntary recruitment posters were created to advertise the research and in the hopes of initiating some interest. The poster can be seen in Appendix 4.

3.3.3.4.1 Posters

The posters needed to include all of the basic information about the study as well as explain what would be required of the women if they chose to participate. This proved difficult; there was information that would have proved useful to include that would not fit and would have left the poster too full meaning people wouldn't read it. The poster also needed to include a contact number. This was an interesting obstacle. Previously when working with this client group a work phone has been provided so contact has been maintained without the requirement of sharing a personal number. Sharing a personal number would breach boundaries when working with vulnerable people and could be dangerous for both the service user and professional. As a researcher those boundaries are slightly different although for two reasons it was still important that boundaries with the female participants were maintained.

Firstly there was still a need to retain some form of professionalism so that participants could fully grasp the role of a researcher and not confuse it with an advisor or friend. To not understand this could mean confusion about confidentiality and what will happen to the information given – they may think that some things were said in confidence and feel let down when they find out it has been used within the thesis. Secondly due to previous history of having worked with the homeless population there was a chance that a previous service user or even somebody being currently supported or to be supported in the future would find the number breaking professional boundaries and causing conflict within this role. To avoid a breach a cheap pay as you go mobile was purchased that could be used solely for the purpose of this research.

Furthermore the purpose of providing a direct contact number as well as producing the posters was to help to create a distance between the research and the services being accessed. This hopefully could mean that any influence from previous relationships – good or bad – could be reduced. Schultz (1997) talks about the varying views participants may have of a researcher before a relationship is established, this perception is based on the way in which they are introduced and their familiarity and relationship with that source. Providing some distance could help to avoid confusion about who is asking for this information.

Once the design for the poster had been determined services spoken to previously in the mapping study were contacted and asked whether the research could be advertised within them. It was explained that the intention of the posters was for women to see this poster and make contact, even if only one woman chose to do so. The first two weeks of June were used to advertise the research in this way and to await contact through the posters, however, none came.

3.3.3.4.2 Coffee Mornings

Still determined to avoid keyworkers suggesting or referring individuals and considering the advice given by services which showed understanding that for women to be willing to talk to a researcher they would have to trust them, or believe that they could, it was decided that an attempt to meet the women personally and start to build a relationship would be made. Services were again contacted and asked whether it would be possible meet some of their

women. The services that offered a day centre or meeting group suggested that I attend and talk to some of their service users within them and for those services who did not offer group activities a bid to recreate a similar environment was made. Coffee mornings were chosen to gather people together and took place within the services. Creating a new poster to advertise them permission was again requested from services who fortunately felt it was a great idea and agreed to offer the spaces to conduct them. An example of this poster can be found in Appendix 5.

The coffee mornings had varying degrees of success. Some were well attended and provided an opportunity to talk to a larger number of women at one time about the research and ask for their participation. Others were attended by smaller numbers but led to one woman from each expressing an interest in participating in the research. How the research was to be conducted and what would be expected of the women was central to these discussions. Some of the women were clear that they did not want to or could not commit to three separate meetings, some women stated that they saw this as an opportunity to do something good for other women and explore their own journeys supporting the view of Birch and Miller (2000) who argue that supporting people to produce narratives is a reflexive act and that 'the researcher may become the catalyst for revisiting very private and/or unhappy experiences' which can lead to greater understanding of their circumstances or histories (189). All of the women wanted to know what will happen to the information and it was explained that recommendations will be released to services and interested parties following the data's analysis, women were also informed that this does not necessarily mean that recommendations will be acted upon.

Participant Information Leaflets were given out at the coffee morning if women showed an interest in the research and follow up meetings were arranged with individuals to go through it again, ask for consent and to complete stage one – the timeline.

Women began to share their experiences in these meetings, and it was interesting to observe the difference in attitude to each other's experiences, the vast difference in actual experience and the common threads of relationship breakdown and desire for settled and safe accommodation. From this first stage of attendance at the drop-ins and coffee mornings seven women agreed to participate in the study and signed consent forms. It was arranged for follow

up meetings with all women within a week of gaining their consent. It was felt that this short time frame was important to maintain a momentum with women who understandably had greater and more urgent matters to address. These few days to a week however also played the important role of giving the women time to reflect on what they had agreed upon and whether it was something they really wanted to be involved in.

Coffee mornings were also useful to establish women's eligibility for the research on which this thesis is based. This information was gathered through conversation with the women and an explanation of the criteria for data collection. For several of the women it was hard for them to differentiate between their experiences alone and the experiences they had had as children or with partners and their children as one had seemingly led to another. Women were therefore not prevented from talking about this time in interviews but focus was placed on their time as a single woman as per the definition used in this research – to be considered without a partner and without dependent children, and therefore requiring accommodation as a single person.

Of the seven women that initially showed an interest through the recruitment methods discussed above five of the final eight participants were met. The other three women were recruited through word-of-mouth between the women once the data collection had begun and through time spent within services and talking to other service users.

3.3.3.5 Materials

The data collection process with women took place in three stages. Firstly this was to allow time for a relationship to build between the researcher and the participants and secondly to allow time in the data collection process for mixed methods to be used resulting in richer data being received. Furthermore to combat criticism that has been levied previously at 'interview-obtained transcripts' that argues that they are restrictive and their analysis is solely based on the desires and experience of the researcher, it was decided not to rely solely on interviews (9: Andrews, Squire and Tamboukou, 2013).

Data-gathering took place in either the place of residence of the women at the time or within the buildings of the services in which I had met the women. This was to allow women to feel comfortable and safe and provided suitable rooms that offered confidentiality for the women which had previously discounted public environments as an option. The women were asked if

they were happy to meet within the service or if they would like another location to be sought but all said they wanted the meetings to take place in the service I met them (Moore and Miller, 1999). All of the meetings took place with the women alone. It was felt this was important so that a true account of their experiences as possible could be heard and to reinforce the importance of the woman's narrative. To have a keyworker, partner or friend present may have led the women to give the 'story' that this other party would like to hear.

All the meetings were recorded with written consent of the participants obtained. All of the recordings were transcribed verbatim so that summarised accounts could be used in the final stage and also for analysis at a later stage using thematic analysis. Attempting to complete three interviews with the women and transcribe all of the data proved time consuming and complex. To ensure that the information remained confidential all recordings, transcripts and consent forms were kept in locked files in a password protected laptop or for paper versions kept in a locked drawer in my home that only I had access too.

The services that the women participants used and whose venue was used had no objection to their service users being spoken to and allowed the research to take place in a confidential room without interruption. This was important as this allowed full concentration on the conversation and the information being shared. This use of qualitative methods to gather data gave an insight into the women's homeless history, the services they have used and how they've used them but also more detail about how they felt about these experiences and the impact this had on them. There were some commonalities in these experiences but the findings also show huge disparities and some very unique experiences. The following three section explain in greater detail the methods used within the three stages.

3.3.3.5.1 Stage One – Creative Methods

In the first meeting women were supported to draw and complete a timeline. A timeline is a visual depiction of a period of time marking significant events that have occurred during it - in this case the woman's experience of homeless services. This included what led them to be homeless, when and where they first accessed support, who from and for how long, how they felt at this time and other areas that may have impacted on this support. A line was drawn onto a piece of paper and the purpose of the timeline was explained, women quite often at this stage would then begin to talk about the services they had used which were then plotted

along the line in the correct place. Supporting information was also requested, such as where they heard about the service, methods used to access them and support received. This additional information was written onto the timeline with the agreement of the women and further informed the contextual knowledge – mentioned in step one of Doddard's seven steps - of their homeless journey. The timelines aided the conversation when the interviews began as they served to frame the dialogue and provide a method of checking for the women involved.

Each of the first meetings with women began with an explanation of the process of the data collection and the intended use of the findings in terms of inclusion within a thesis and being presented within overall findings to services in the city. It was then explained what would happen within the first session and the requirement to complete a timeline of their experiences and use of homeless services.

Timelines are useful visual aids to support the building of narratives. Arguments against the reliability of narratives have often included the reliance on individual memory. When interviewing a community that is notoriously chaotic this reliance could face further scrutiny. The use of plotting actions on a timeline enabled individuals to question the sequence of events without interrupting the flow of discourse established within an interview. Furthermore when the interviews began in the second stage this previously agreed timeline framed the dialogue and provided a method of checking for the women involved. In this first session women's homeless journey's so far, when they began, who they sought help from, significant events and crises, how they found out about the different services available and how they accessed them were all discussed. Although this often came out in conversation at this stage, it was not imperative to know about their feelings towards these experiences and their wishes for their future.

Paper was placed on the ground between me and the women during their creation; Chambers (1997) argues that using the floor acts as an 'equaliser' and helps to reduce the power level between researchers and participants as everybody is working at the same level (cited in Veale 2005). Within the timeline creation however, quite often I found as the researcher I would be on the floor whilst the women sat in a chair above me directing what should be written.

When creating the timelines it was noticeable that for these women the homeless journey began at different stages and their first time of seeking support occurred for varying reasons, where they chose to start retelling their story started at different points too. For some women their homeless journey began in childhood, for others they would count only when they came to reside in a homeless accommodation such as a hostel. Even with the visual element of a timeline, and the obvious starting point therefore being at the beginning, women started their narratives at different points – sometimes at the end, sometimes in the middle. Those who were homeless at the time of the interview and residing in hostel accommodation most often chose to start their story there, those who had experienced a significant event whilst being homeless – such as a death or domestic abuse – chose that point to highlight their journey. This required some focusing in the creation of the timeline and demonstrated their purpose. Many of these meetings were shorter than I had first envisioned with the purpose to gain facts rather than feelings and opinions, but they proved helpful for me to start building a relationship with participants, something that was important if wishing to gain a true insight into these women's lives.

After the very first timeline creation the female participant was asked about her experience of creating a timeline. The woman commented that she felt it was a good way of getting her to think about her experiences and when and how they occurred; she also felt the timeline would be useful in the second stage of the research process, the semi-structured interview.

I wanted to be able to include the timelines created with the women so that the reader could depict the process more easily and better grasp their value. However, due to the agreement and need to anonymise the services within this thesis this was not possible. Services were named on the timelines produced as part of their natural production with women so that we could return to them and build on discussions around them. Attempts were made to anonymise the timelines to offer a visual aid to the reader however, this also did not work as all that was left was a line and dates. In the end the decision has been made to recreate a replica timeline based on an original produced with one of the single homeless women participants using the service numbers instead of names; this can be seen in Appendix 6.

3.3.3.5.2 Stage Two – Semi-structured Interviews

In the second meeting women were 'interviewed' using a semi structured format resulting in more of a conversational dialect than a formal process. In this interview women were asked to describe in their own words their experience of homeless services in the city and what support they would like in the future. Birch and Miller describe using interviews as entering the 'intimate sphere' due to the personal nature of the information that can be discussed and the potential of the researcher to act as a 'catalyst' for individuals to revisit difficult and emotional events (189:2000). Having previously started the process of data collection with women at this stage this proved even truer. Skills developed as a practitioner were useful here to manage this information sharing and to demonstrate empathy to female participants. Once the interviews were conducted they completed steps 2 – 5 of Doddard's seven steps, as referred to previously, and provided further context in which to understand the women themselves.

The second stage interviews began in a similar vein of reminding participants about the research and an explanation of what this meeting was to entail. Once women had agreed to continue, their timeline was used to remind them of our previous discussion and remained on display throughout the interview to remind women of the chronology they had shared in the previous meeting. Often as experiences and feelings surrounding the events shown were discussed women added to the timeline or moved things around. In addition timelines reminded women of an experience and enabled them able to say 'oh actually that didn't happen then, it was after…'. It was interesting to note how each of the women used the timeline differently from ignoring it, referring to it, to encourage memories or simply to order their stories. These meetings lasted around an hour although they were not timed or restricted to allow the women as long as they needed as suggested by Moore and Miller (1999).

Interviews were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim. Summarised accounts were then developed to use in the final meeting with the women themselves in which it was discussed with the women the summary and my understanding of their experiences and timelines.

3.3.3.5.3 Stage Three – Member checking and added extras

In the third meeting the summary, the understanding of their experiences and their timelines were discussed with women. This presented an opportunity to ensure that the information gathered was accurate and allowed women to confirm it could be included in the final thesis.

The meeting was also an opportunity for any further details previously missed to be drawn from the women adding to the depth of the narrative once more.

Once all the data had been collected it was time to analyse it.

3.4 Interpretation

It is in the analysis that Bruner's first use of narrative as method is applied in this project – searching for 'classic groupings' and identifying themes. Narrative approaches use numerous data analysis methods, some methods compare and analyse across instances whereas some narrative methodology focuses on individual cases, ideally analysis would encompass both approaches. This thesis used thematic analysis as it not only fitted with the social constructionist theoretical perspective but it allowed for both approaches to take place. Being able to consider the narratives individually was particularly useful here as the data encompasses lengthy life histories of individual women that needed to be sensitively drawn together and thematic analysis allowed for them to be organised and the data to be compartmentalised so that I could begin to make sense of the material received. Thematic analysis did this through breaking down the narratives into manageable chunks of information that provide answers to how services work with women and how single homeless women are affected by the welfare reform and in that context experience homeless services. As these 'chunks' could be as large as I felt appropriate it also allowed me as a researcher to ensure that the detail given in interviews was maintained and the information that was important to participants had been accounted for.

Polkinghorne describes themes as 'the plot' and bringing these themes together as the process of 'emplotment' (5: 1995). Transcripts, timelines and additional quotes received from all participants, including services and single homeless women were subject to thematic analysis that focused on the content of the narratives rather than the language that was used within them. This focus enabled the experiences of single homeless women to be explored. Interviews were first analysed individually before the analysis was integrated across cases so that similarities and differences could be found.

As explained previously interviews were transcribed verbatim. The process began with reading and re-reading the content received from the services and female participants allowing me to

immerse myself in the data. This allowed me to familiarise myself with the material and establish initial ideas about the different categories that could take shape whilst applying initial 'codes'. Codes in this case were numbers, making them easy to identify and recognise easily. Once I became aware of the codes in the text I searched for themes (or patterns) of similar attitudes and behaviours evident in the narratives. 'Thematic maps' were then developed to provide a visual aid to this process and enable themes to be confined to those that were most significant. This attributing of themes was a continuous and cyclical process throughout the data analysis to try and ensure that all possible themes had been recognised. Themes were also reviewed throughout the process establishing that they remain true and suitable for the research. I continued my analysis by matching all relevant data to each theme, this process continued throughout the writing up of the findings and discussion with them ever changing and evolving. Through the reviewing of the data it became clear that the initial broader themes could be broken down even further. For example the concerns that were highlighted for single homeless women by services could be broken down into those that were suggested by services as to be different for them than other sectors of the homeless population; such as single homeless men and homeless women with children. These were then recoded to 'concerns different for women' and 'concerns for all'. Through this cyclical and repetitive process new codes were generated and then refined.

The next stage of thematic analysis is to define the themes and to evidence how they answer the initial questions of the research; or potentially what other questions the information may ask. Themes were then named under appropriate subordinate conceptual headings. The process continued until the detail the women wanted to present and the information that was important to them could be accounted for. Using thematic analysis the views and words of women could still be represented and their meaning and intensity maintained. It has been argued that to speed up the process and to add rigour computer assisted qualitative data analysis software could have been used, however I had concerns that this would provide some distance between myself and the material presented.

Thematic analysis has been criticised, with some researchers claiming that it is an unreliable form of analysis due to the ability of the researcher to interpret the data too freely (Guest, McQueen and Namey, 2012). This is combatted within this thesis through the recognition of the researcher's position and therefore their focus on interpretation. Furthermore it has been

suggested that thematic analysis lacks direction in 'higher level analysis' (Braun and Clarke, 2013). One of the reasons has been its lack of theoretical framework, which also makes it a flexible type of analysis. To combat this this thesis has used thematic analysis within a wider theoretical framework. Further detail about how this analysis worked in practice is given in Section 3.5.1.

3.5 Methodological Considerations in Practice

> Connelly and Clandinin describe narrative as 'the study of the ways humans experience the world' (2: 1990). I wanted to study how women experienced their world of homeless services and therefore it made sense to use narrative inquiry to conduct the field research...Conducting narrative research enabled me to gather stories from single homeless women using their own words and with little interruption. Women could say as little or as much as they liked, and 'tell it like it is' (Cotterill and Letherby, 1993: 74). I felt it was the 'right' methodology for this research because it would allow women's stories to be told exactly as they wished them to be, their wordings would not be adapted and they would have the freedom to build their story as they wished. Using creative methods and interviews would also, I hoped, allow women different vehicles with which to participate. Of course, the possibility for exploitation still lays in the analysis stages and 'interpretation and analysis remains the prerogative of the investigator' - me (Graham: 119 in Cotterill and Letherby 1993: 74).

As previously explained the use of narrative research methods, is based in the theory of social constructionism. Creative methods also operate as a 'constructivist tool' which may assist research participants in recounting and relating their experiences as well as giving them meaning. This thesis has used narrative methodology and creative methods to build the stories of eight single homeless women's lives and address the research objectives, expressing women's experiences using their own words. In addition the research drew on the feminist understanding of acknowledging partiality and then adopting a form of reflexivity to better understand the researcher, the researched and the research context (Rose, 1997: 1). The perspectives not only allowed for me to incorporate my own values into the research process by ensuring that the women's own voices were not lost in the analysis, but also enabled their individual experiences to be understood within a broader structural context.

3.5.1 Analysis in Practice

The process is of course only part of the story; my main concern throughout the research was being able to make these women heard.

I felt a huge responsibility in managing these stories, who am I to say what is a key theme, what is important and what can get missed out of their story? I was grateful to these women that they had not only given their time but believed in what I was doing enough to be a part of it.

As previously explained after considering how to balance the purpose of the research, which is to answer the research question, what I personally wanted to achieve with this research (for it to be a platform to express the personal experiences of homeless women) and the best methods to achieve both of these things I chose to use narrative research methods. Initially therefore I read further about narrative analysis itself. Narrative analysis in many ways suited the research I was conducting in that it centres on 'cases' and considers the 'stories' produced within the context of the social and cultural circumstances in which they are based (Reissman, 2008, Braun and Clarke, 2013). However, I also found that narrative analysis often overlooks the role of the researcher in data collection and construction of those narratives (Braun and Clarke, 2013), something I felt was imperative to a deeper understanding of representation of the data from single homeless women and their experiences.

On further consideration of approaches for analysis, thematic analysis was explored and ultimately chosen as a method to analyse all of the qualitative data collected. As an approach it seemed 'intuitive', and on reflection perhaps, as Reissman suggests, as a practitioner early on in their venture into the world of research its 'straightforward' nature appealed (p73, Reissman, 2008). As a method it also fit with the social constructionist theoretical perspective of the research overall and allowed me flexibility in its application. Furthermore, thematic analysis offers an opportunity to identify common themes across the research and can be applied to a wide variety of data and has been well rehearsed in other studies with a sociological perspective. However, to ensure that I was able to maintain the essence of the narrative methodology underpinning the research I needed to apply additional considerations to this analysis and in reality the analysis approach I ended up with was perhaps a 'thematic narrative analysis' (Reissman, 2008).

Using a narrative methodology meant that I had accepted the 'stories' I would be told – the data that I was collecting - could be open to change dependant on who the single homeless woman was talking to, why they were sharing their life history and who the researcher was. In the data therefore I was analysing not only the content but also the feelings the women were describing (or could be detected), important stages and moments in the story and the influence of others, including services, on their journey through homelessness. From this I was able to start to detect patterns and 'themes', and there thematic analysis could be applied.

The process of analysis was cyclical and lengthy with much time dedicated to transcribing and familiarising myself with the women's narratives. It could have been made much quicker with the support of a computer assisted qualitative data analysis software but I had concerns that this would provide some distance between myself and the material presented. Despite the time, or perhaps because of the time spent analysing the data, the method used to analyse it was successful in ensuring that both similarities and differences could be identified in the women's narratives. Reading the transcripts over and over allowed me to immerse myself in each woman's story and codes were then assigned to any initial categories that stood out from the data. Themes were then developed from the codes. Patterns of similar behaviour evident in the texts were then searched for and all relevant data was matched to each one.

The analysis method also ensured the views and words of women could still be represented and their meaning and intensity maintained. In fact, how much of the women's narratives should be included in the written thesis, was a question over which I deliberated at length. Narrative analysis endeavours to keep the narrative 'intact' yet I found to be able to reach the desired level of interpretation the narratives would need to be broken down and thematic analysis allowed me to do this (p333: Braun and Clarke, 2013). As explained in my reflections I felt great responsibility in handling the women's life histories and wanted to ensure their voices were heard, therefore I found it much harder than I anticipated to 'chop up' their narratives for analysis. I found that when analysing I was using what Braun and Clarke (2013) describe as a combination of thematic analysis approaches; both illustrative – where 'data quotations' are used to demonstrate the points of analysis I make - and interpretative – where larger 'chunks' of data are used and my analysis relates closely to the narrative itself. In this way using thematic analysis allowed me to break down the narratives into more manageable chunks where necessary, so that the answers to the research questions could be sought and

any individual behaviour that seemed at odds with the themes identified became visible once the narratives had been dissected. In addition however, it allowed me to keep the essence of the women within the representation of the data.

During the analysis process it felt necessary for additional context for the themes, experiences and 'stories' to make sense. To achieve this Chapter 5 starts with an introduction to each woman and a 'synopsis' of their narrative. These were particularly useful to have to refer back to when interpreting the data and considering the meaning of the women's experiences. They also allow the reader to understand the interpretation of the data with a greater 'insider knowledge' and it allowed me to focus on more of the hidden connotations within the data, creating a deeper level of analysis that moves away from the descriptive. For example, using the timelines had enabled me to get a better understanding of the women's experiences than simply asking them the research questions may have done. The findings in Chapter 5 clearly demonstrate a disparity between the women's positive words about services and the content of their narratives when describing their experiences due to the women's expectations and ability to believe their worth, which is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6 section 6.2. If the women had simply been asked about their experiences of services the findings would have been very different to those presented here after their 'whole' homeless experience has been listened to and analysed. To build on the previous example, women would at times speak positively about the service they were residing in and talk about how happy they were with their room, but as I immersed myself in the analysis contradictions became apparent, the same women shared experiences that belied their 'happiness' such as using furniture to blockade their room door to help them feel safe. The lack of accommodation or options presented to single homeless women meant that they expected so little and accepted these insecurities as they were seemingly better than no options or the alternative of 'rooflessness'. The disparity also demonstrates that the analysis could be developed further with additional examination of the composition of the women's narratives.

I also found the continuous cycle of analysis beneficial in allowing me to immerse myself in the data and supporting my interpretation, however there is no denying the amount of time that this took. Another positive about the process came from including from the data collected from single homeless women their own words in each of the themes; it was valuable as it

helped to summarise the theme/sub-theme but also gave me what Hunter (2010) describes as 'quotable quotes' to use within the written thesis itself.

As explained in section 3.4 codes were applied to each of the themes as they were discovered. The themes themselves continued to change throughout the analysis and 'writing up' period of the research on which this thesis is based and the two processes were entirely connected. The more time I spent with the data the more themes became apparent and then the titles of themes changed or the order in which they were 'told' was altered. For example, through the continual cycle of reviewing the data it became clear that the initial broader themes could be broken down even further. The theme of 'concerns highlighted for single homeless women' could be broken down into those that were suggested by services as to be different for them than other sectors of the homeless population; such as single homeless men and homeless women with children. These were then recoded to 'concerns different for women', 'concerns for all' etc. These concerns were also declared as greater concerns for some services, for different reasons and with varying frequency. So although drugs were talked about with all bar one of the services, they were of a lesser concern to the service supporting homeless single women with mental health problems as their criteria meant that they were unable to accept women using drugs in the first place.

Chapter's 4 and 5 show a broad range of perceptions and experiences. Although not wholly representative due to the number of participants, it is important to note that a number of common themes have transpired. These themes were only able to be identified due to the strength of the data and the time spent familiarising myself with it. Both of these would not have been possible in this thesis within a larger study.

3.5.2 Data Collection

The ability to build a relationship of trust is the most important thing in being a practitioner. It is this that enables you to hear the experiences of individuals and to gain some understanding of their needs. It is trust that allows that relationship to continue when things go wrong and it is trust that allows you to ask and receive answers to the difficult questions. This trust is often built through good communication, time, and willingness to listen and appear not to judge and through doing as you said you would, but most frequently it is built through a willingness to create it. This willingness for me comes from a belief in what I do and a desire to facilitate change, from clients it often comes from a need or a want for help.

It became clear quite quickly that as a researcher a trusting relationship was just as important, issues in recruitment show that single homeless women would not even participate if they felt they could not trust me. As single homeless women could see quite quickly that participating in the research would not necessarily help them directly, and not all of them had a desire to help others, I realised I would have to develop a willingness to create a trusting relationship in other ways.

Once the data collection began it became clear that the population that the research was based within and the planned data collection schedule were at odds with one another. Due to the women's individual circumstances at the time of interview attending three separate interviews was not possible, nor imperative, for all of the women. Only five of the eight women completed all three stages of data collection. Two completed the first two stages and one only completed the first stage due to being imprisoned after the first interview took place. The three stages of the data collection process were, stage one – creative methods and completion of the timelines, stage two – semi-structured interviews and stage three – member checking and anything extra.

Chapter 5 demonstrates challenges in gathering the data present due to some of the women's use of substances. To remain ethical it required flexibility as a researcher and a willingness to arrange, re-arrange and re-arrange again meetings with the women. The timing of the interviews was given much consideration and arranged where possible to try and prevent the need to re-arrange and to attempt to talk to women when it suited them and when they would be at their most conducive, but still many of the appointments made with women were not kept. Fortunately my previous experience of being a homeless practitioner prepared me for the challenge and aided my understanding, furthermore it helped me to identify other ethical and safeguarding considerations during the data collection process. There were several incidences when the interviews were limited or conversation direction was changed to protect

the vulnerable participant which derived from my ability as a practitioner to anticipate an individual's mood or potential repercussion's. As a researcher this can present the challenge of ensuring information remains unaffected and that vital details have not been missed. The building of a relationship stated in the reflexive excerpt is imperative to ensure these concerns can be discussed and/or addressed rather than avoided or missed.

One of the women I interviewed seemed to just disappear, nobody knew where she had gone and this led to some concern in the service she had been frequenting. This left me with a dilemma, the service was aware that I had been speaking with her and she was happy for them to know. I was concerned when she did not attend one of our meetings as she had originally sought me out so felt it was safe to ask them if they had seen her, however they had no answers and the only other people that I knew that may were her associates at the service. I was unsure however if she had informed them that she was involved in the study. I did not want to break confidentiality and knew that in time any information they had would be passed to the service who could safely inform me. I continued to visit the service in the hope she would return and heard nothing for several months until I was informed that she had been sent to prison and on her release she would be homeless again.

My previous occupation as a homeless practitioner also brought with it its own challenges. Whilst completing stage one of the data collection process with one of the women I started to realise that the narrative she was telling me was familiar. She was speaking a lot about her daughter and the difficulties she had had. I realised that I had supported her daughter previously as a professional. This left me with a dilemma of how to manage the conflicting roles; as a practitioner I could not break the confidentiality of my ex-client and as a researcher it felt unethical to continue having conversations with this female participant without her knowing I am already aware of a different version of events. The dilemma was intensified by the fact that the woman had lots of detail and information about the services that I did not want to lose. I took the decision to stop the research after one interview, however, fortunately when I went to meet her to explain there had been a conflict of interest her daughter was with her and informed her mother of our previous professional relationship. Her mother then agreed to continue.

Additional challenges were present when trying to contact the women who had agreed to participate in the study. Not all of them had a phone, and those that did either changed their phone and number frequently or often had no credit. Women generally agreed that they could be contacted through the services and that I could leave messages for them there, however this was something I wanted to do as seldom as possible to maintain confidentiality. Furthermore, two of the women moved on from the service they were using before the final meeting could take place and I was unable to contact them at all.

The challenges discussed above combined meant that attempting to complete three interviews with the women and the data collection process took longer than anticipated and in hindsight I would have started this process sooner. I would also have endeavoured to get a confirmed additional contact for the women so that I may have been able to member check the information they had given me. However, although these are useful points for me to learn as a researcher, enough detail was gathered from the timelines to be able to start to answer the research questions. The timelines allowed women to speak more freely than a traditional interview setting may have, they were able to start their story where they wanted to but were able to place some form of chronology to their narratives. Using the timelines as a framework the women spoke around each 'point' in detail and using the timeline as a visual aid meant that often each one experience written down prompted a memory of the next and a lot of thought. The first meeting was the longest with each of the women. The second meeting was an added bonus that added depth and understanding to the women's situations and the third enabled me to check that they were happy with the information they had offered, but all the women had signed participation information sheets to say they consented to their information being used. I therefore feel that the meetings not completed do not reduce the value of the research.

3.5.3 Power struggle

Women had to feel that they could be equal in this process or at least that they had some of the power. It has been argued that employing the techniques I am attempting here – of being open and honest about my position and through sharing my experience, researchers can help to break down the power barriers (Coterrill and Letherby: 72). Although there are still some obvious gaps in this thought process, namely that I had everything to gain from the interaction, I adopted this approach with the women I met.

In the previous section I outlined several ethical dilemmas that arose during the collection of the data. In addition to those explored, I was aware throughout the process of the power imbalance occurring whilst speaking to the women. This perhaps could have been intensified due to my previous role as a practitioner.

When working as a practitioner I naturally had all the power, I dictated what information should be shared, whether somebody was fit enough to receive support (and therefore a bed for the night) and I had influence over whether somebody was able to continue to stay within the service (and therefore continue to receive a bed for the night). As a practitioner I would have been able to use this 'power' to illicit information a person may rather not share and to insist on certain interventions. As a researcher the power differences were altered. The researcher has the power over how to use somebodies story and which bits. In contrast to the role of a practitioner a major ethical concern therefore is the danger that participants will reveal more information than they wished to do so and that when retelling their story the findings are sensationalised (Letherby 2003, Plummer 2001). In an effort to combat this the third stage of the data collection process was included so that the women had an opportunity to reiterate their experiences and add to them, or if desired to retract information they had decided they no longer wanted to include. In reality the second stage acted in the same way. In addition to reduce the amount of interpretation Chapters 5 and 6 demonstrate inclusion of findings from all the women who took part in this research using their own words and any differences as well as any similarities have been shown.

3.5.4 Limitations

Several of the limitations have been discussed above, but there are others that it would be imprudent not to discuss.

The women who participated in the study were of varying ages with varied experiences of homelessness. They were however all White, and predominantly White British. This was not a conscious decision of the research, merely a consequence of the participants however it should not be ignored. The findings may have been different had the sample been more ethnically diverse. Furthermore, all of the women who spoke of intimate relationships spoke of heterosexual relationships. Again an accidental factor rather than one that was sought but the implications of this on the research are impossible to know. Further research is therefore

needed to better understand the experiences of services by single homeless women from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds, and/or from the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning (LGBTQ) community.

As discussed earlier in this chapter every attempt was made to 'recruit' women to participate in the study rather than have them directed to me through services, and although some success was had, services were still required as an access to women and therefore they were still aware of the women who were participating. This may not have deterred the women who did share their experiences but would have put off others who may have been able to contribute an alternative viewpoint. This research was explicitly looking at the experiences of services by homeless women and therefore to exclude services was not possible; additionally due to the 'hidden' nature of female homelessness this connection with services is unsurprising, but if further research could find an alternative method of recruitment this would give an interesting insight into the experiences of women.

Most of the women who I spoke with during the data collection were resident in one of the accommodation services. This may have been because they were only at that point identifying as homeless, but this did mean that the majority of the data gathered came from those women who used a service directly effecting their homelessness – which was not my original intention. However they were encouraged throughout the interviews to share their experiences of all services supporting them or had previously supported them with homelessness (and contributing factors, i.e. substance misuse) and these experiences were also included in the findings. I have spoken about this here only because it is unclear whether women identify services not specifically for the homeless as supporting them out of homelessness. Again further research with women not using 'homeless' services would be beneficial to understanding single females experiencing homelessness.

Finally one of the limitations may be the size of the study. Qualitative research that focuses on a small participant group is sometimes criticised due to the belief that its findings would not be replicated elsewhere. Whilst it may be true that even a replica study may find new participants or that these participants' views may now differ from those at the time the findings here show much similarities with previous research conducted with the homeless population. Furthermore, these women are not extraordinary in that they were randomly recruited and

therefore it can be assumed that other homeless women using homeless services may have had comparable experiences, meaning that similar findings could be sought.

3.6 Summary

Narrative research allows new, and perhaps previously unanticipated, information to emerge from participants free of our assumptions and prejudices'
(191: Gottlieb and Lasser, 2001)

The use of stories to describe and explain experiences is not a new phenomenon. Its use within qualitative research is continuing to develop and despite the criticisms levied at it for being too unstructured and unguided, many qualitative researchers continue to support and enjoy its use. The ability to hear about a phenomenon from somebody who has lived it and to include other 'supporting' evidence is its main draw. I have outlined in this chapter how I applied the philosophies of narrative research and kept and included narratives within this thesis. The use of timelines, semi-structured interviews and mapping formed 'stories' detailing how women experienced homeless services within a period of change in the welfare and political structures in England. Using narrative research and applying the investigation within just one city precludes any attempt to generalise any findings further than this. The study however, gives an insight into these experiences that is useful and valuable to the participants themselves and other researchers of this area.

In this chapter I have highlighted areas of the research process that create challenges for researchers and demonstrated how the methods used and the research process itself may help to overcome these. Particular attention has been paid to the population with which the research was conducted recognising that good research requires sensitivity to their needs and environment. It also requires acknowledgement of the different skills and methods expected to express this sensitivity. I have also shown throughout this chapter how this research considered the needs of single homeless women through the design of a research process suitable for and sensitive to its participants.

Readers should now have a viewpoint with which to interpret the findings of the research and a clearer comprehension of the researcher and the research process. Specific challenges for accessing organisations, engaging with participants, collecting data and meeting the

requirements of ethical approval for this research have been addressed and arguments for the decisions made have been presented demonstrating a desire to be congruent and transparent in conducting the research and allowing the reader to develop understanding of the research findings when they are presented. The issue of positionality has been a central theme for both phase one and phase two of this research and the varying ways in which this has affected decisions and the research process has been expressed in this chapter. The next chapter will address the findings of the 'mapping study' described here setting the scene for the environment in which single homeless women are supported.

Chapter 4: Findings from the 'Mapping Study'

This chapter presents findings from phase one of the study, the mapping of organisations with a remit for working with homeless people in the city. This data, gathered from agencies and organisations, aims to increase understanding of the activities and challenges of the homelessness sector and also serves to contextualise phase two presented in Chapter 5, the data generated through using participatory methods with homeless women. Within Chapter 3 the reasoning for conducting a mapping study was explained and the process used to collect the data examined. Here the results of the data analysis are presented.

This chapter begins by looking at the participants to the study. Secondly the main themes that arose from this mapping study will be established. The chapter ends by considering their significance to the research on which thesis reports.

4.1 The participants

Twenty two services offering support to the homeless population were identified initially through previous knowledge, word of mouth and electronic media, see Table 2. Some of these 22 services were run by the same organisation, for example one organisation ran accommodation services for men and women, floating support in the community for four separate groups and young people's accommodation. This therefore narrowed down contactable services to sixteen. The purpose of the mapping study was to survey, examine and document the type of organisations, the methods used, how they are accessed, the number of women they support and their view on the issue of female homelessness in the city they are based. The mapping study had a strong empirical focus, providing data and other information, including funding streams, changes to the service both recent and expected, and their relationships with other services in the city.

Type of Service	Number	For Women	For Men
Homeless Accommodation for single people	2	Yes	Yes
Floating Support Services	2	Yes	Yes
Residential Accommodation for those displaying Mental Ill Health	1	Yes	Yes
Young People's Accommodation Services	3	Yes	Yes
Health Services	1	Yes	Yes
Day Centres	1	Yes	Yes
Drug and Alcohol Services for adults	1	Yes	Yes
Offender hostel	3	**No**	Yes
A working community with accommodation	1	Yes	Yes
Drug and Alcohol Services for young people	1	Yes	Yes
Supported accommodation in the community	1	Yes	Yes
Services for 'working women'	1	Yes	**No**
Other Support	3	Yes	Yes
Total	**22**	**18**	**21**

Table 2. Services identified in the City

Organisations working with homeless women were contacted via email and telephone. The research aims and objectives were explained and services were invited to participate in an initial interview. Ten services responded willing to participate in the study. The reasons for not participating amongst the other six varied from no contact received, time constraints and being a brand new service with no real presence in the city at the time. Table 3 shows the participants included in this study which equates to 10 different services. Services included in the data collection are given a number to be referred by, this helps to protect anonymity and keep confidentiality; the table illustrates the number given to each service.

Type of Service	Number Service referred by	Number of services in City	For Women	For Men
Homeless Accommodation for single people	5	1	Yes	Yes
Residential Accommodation for those displaying Mental Ill Health	7	1	Yes	Yes
Young People's Accommodation Services	10	1	Yes	Yes
Health Services	9	1	Yes	Yes
Day Centres	3	1	Yes	Yes
A working community with accommodation	6	1	Yes	Yes
Supported accommodation in the community also offering floating support	1	1	Yes	Yes
Services for 'sex working women'	4	1	Yes	No
Other Support	2 and 8	2	Yes	Yes
Total		**10**	**10**	**9**

Table 3. Participants included in this mapping study

The range of services was specifically chosen to ensure that a variety of relationships and engagement with homeless women could be included. The wide range also allowed inclusion of organisations funded differently, with different staffing numbers and ratios, different recording systems and with a variety of aims and objectives. The findings from this mapping study will now be presented.

4.2 Findings

4.2.1 The uncertainty of the funding landscape

Historically homelessness has been seen as a housing issue (Fitzpatrick et al., 2000). The 1948 National Assistance Act repealed the old poor laws and was seen as a symbol of the government's intention to 'break with the past' (Cowan, 2011: 147). Under this Act vulnerable groups such as families, the elderly and the 'infirm' or those in urgent need would be offered residential accommodation. This did not include single homeless women (Watson and Austerberry, 1986).

The Homelessness Act (2002) began to change this view, each local authority was required to produce a 'homelessness strategy' and mainstream services were expected to work alongside the third sector in a multi-agency approach to meet the needs of homeless people more completely. The introduction of Supporting People funding in April 2003 combined previously uncoordinated welfare budgets to create a larger pot from which support can be commissioned for those who have 'housing-related' needs. This compounded the view that to tackle homelessness required more than providing a roof over people's heads and a more comprehensive attitude towards homelessness including the need to address other support areas developed (O'Connell, 2003: 158).

Supporting People funding intends to provide support for all vulnerable people in England. It had been ring-fenced since its introduction in 2003 but in 2011 the fence was lifted and the money can now be spent by local authorities on areas that they feel need it. Nine out of 10 services I spoke to in this mapping study were about to face changes to their funding and due to the changes in the way in which Supporting People funding could be spent and the overall multi-million pound cuts in local authority expenditure those reliant on Supporting People funding were the most concerned. Phrases such as 'something will have to give…' and 'there will come a time if it's not financially viable' were heard in all of the interviews, even from the one service not faced by the same financial constraints.

Funding is central to the ability of services to exist and provide a range of services for the homeless population. In the city in which the research is based a major overhaul of the way homeless services were commissioned was due in the year following the mapping study and for some services the commissioning process had already begun (the changes that occurred

can be read in Section 1.4). This meant that the landscape in which single homeless women existed was to change. To be aware of how the services were currently funded and the impact that changes may have therefore was imperative for the study.

Table 4 depicts the various different funding streams used by the 10 services I spoke to. Only the services dependant on central government, a large charitable grant and NHS funding relied solely on one funding stream. The other services used a combination of resources to be able to pay for staffing and support requirements of the service. Funding was a major issue for all of the services I spoke to and all were expecting changes to their funding in the near future, for 90 percent of these services this meant a reduction.

The most frequently depended upon funding is housing benefit. This is due to the fact that five of the 10 services I spoke with provided accommodation for homeless women. To remain accommodated women were expected to claim for housing benefit which due to the nature of the accommodation also included a supporting element. This supporting element provides extra income for the services to provide resources to meet requirements such as health and safety, maintenance of the building, security measures and the cost of the time and staff to ensure these legal requirements are met.

The seven services that used a combination of sources to finance them did so out of necessity, combining income to try and meet the needs of their service users. Only one of the services did this through creating their own revenue in a social enterprise. This service expressed a desire to be fully self-sufficient in the future and remove the need to rely on housing benefit subsidy.

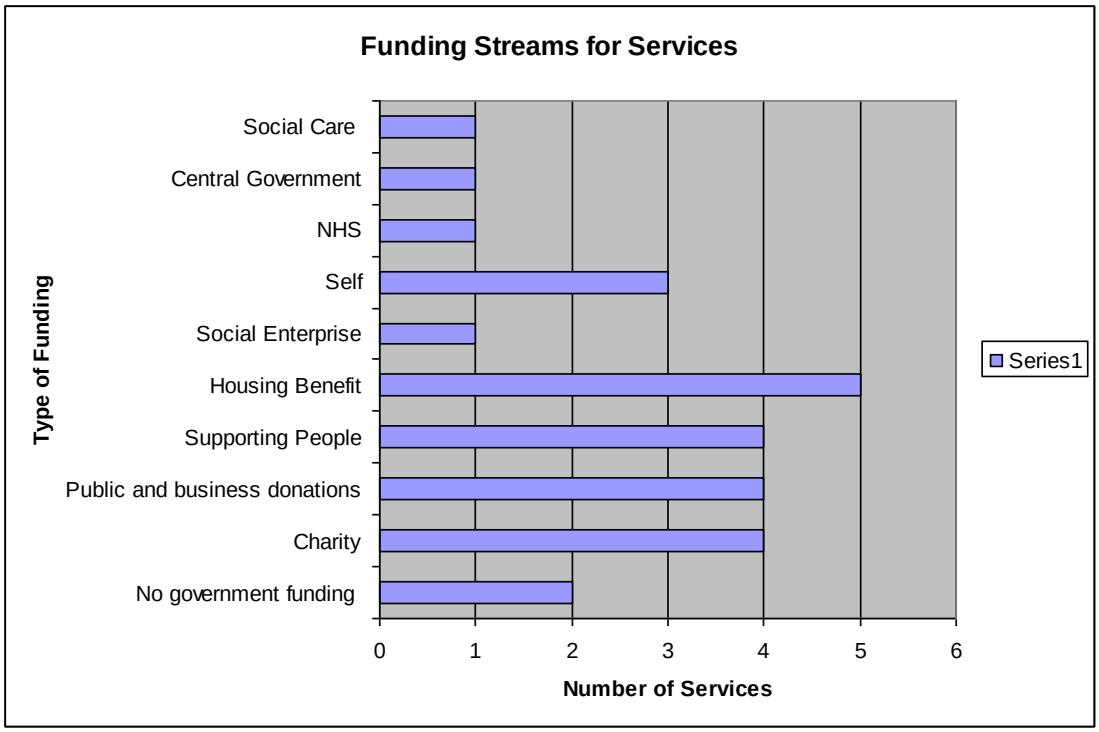

Table 4. Funding Streams for Services

At this point in the research the number of services that existed for the homeless in the City had remained unchanged for many years. This was quite an achievement in a landscape depicted by the Survey of Needs and Provision 2013 as shrinking. The survey found the homeless sector had reduced in size throughout 2012. They also discovered in the year up to November 2012 58 accommodation projects had closed and nearly 2000 bed spaces were lost, whilst the number of homeless people had risen by 10 percent.

All participants stated that the situation within the city was about to change and they feared that this city would soon portray the national landscape.

As Table 4 shows Supporting People funding was central to 30 percent of the services ability to remain afloat. This is not unusual and in fact the majority of homeless services in England rely on funding through 'Supporting People', as service 1 put it:

> …when supporting people first came in there was a wholesale leaving of all of your other sources of funding…possibly a mistake.

As well as concerns about losing or facing a reduction in funding organisations displayed caution about the probability of acquiring replacement income due to, as service 7 worded it, 'everybody will be fighting to get more money from a small pot'. The effect of this was considered to be that services may become 'precious' about what they do and organisations who should be supporting each other and working together will instead be in direct competition (service 6).

The next section will address the question of multi-agency working as demanded by the Homelessness Act 2002 and uncover how these services worked together at the time of the mapping study.

4.2.2 Multi-agency working

All of the services I spoke to stated that they participated in multi-agency working and could list a minimum of five other services they worked with, mostly each other. Barriers to working with other organisations included the fight for funding, differing objectives and most overwhelmingly time; 'time is the biggest issue' (service 8).

The benefits to working with or alongside other service however seemingly outweighed the negatives with services agreeing that:

> …if there's two of us involved we're more likely to have a clearer picture and more help to be able to offer the client. The more support they can get the better really (Service 1).

Furthermore the benefits seem to extend to the viability of a service with several organisations recognising that without multi-agency working:

> …we wouldn't get as many referrals as we do now so we'd struggle to get people in (service 6).

The increased support for women provided through multi-agency working was the most popular opinion of services about working together, demonstrating a commitment to supporting their clients. This commitment could also be seen in their willingness to attempt that their organisation be as accessible as possible. The following section examines the

evidence presented in this mapping study for providing accessibility to the homeless population.

4.2.3 Access to Services

Eight out of the 10 services had policies that women could self-refer, although in reality the frequency of a self-referral differed from service to service. Service 7 stated that it was 'very rare' that women referred themselves whereas for service 3 self-referral was the most common.

Only two of the services I spoke to required a professional to refer service users to them, services 2 and 5. For service 2 it was felt necessary to minimise the service being abused and to manage the professionalism of the service that was almost completely staffed by volunteers. In service 5 a referral was only required for the women they supported and not for the men; the women in this service equated to just five compared to 75 men. I investigated this potential inequity further with the organisation during my interview. The service was subject to the rules of the contract made with the local authority regarding female clients, this contract was different to the one they had signed with males and therefore the referral pathways differed to. This has been recognised as an unhelpful differentiation and one of the changes occurring is to reduce such discrimination. Why this difference was established was not apparent to the service itself but it was clear that this difference created a barrier for women trying to access the service and negatively impacted the morale of the staff:

> …Even if a room is available we're having to turn them away, send them to the council but they have to prioritise, they have a list of people they've already got waiting to come to us…I do find that difficult (service 5).

The varied referral pathways gave the impression that to find support as a single homeless woman should be easy, or at the very least as easy as it is for men; several of the services I spoke to were keen to express that women were 'treated exactly the same' as men (service 3). The literature though shows that for women it is not easy. One of the largest studies to consider the use of services, although it did so within a wider investigation, was commissioned by Crisis. Reeve, Casey and Goudie (2006) found that nearly 40 percent of their sample of homeless women did not access services or 'seek formal…help or assistance' on first finding

themselves homeless, and 23 percent had no regular contact with any support agency (63). Mayock and Sheridan (2012) supported this and argued that many of the women they interviewed had spent a significant amount of time in hidden homeless situations and had not accessed services, either due to fear or unwillingness to associate with homeless people (5). The barriers for single homeless women in accessing the services included in the mapping study will now be addressed.

4.2.4 Barriers for women accessing services

To understand this research in the context of the city female participants are living in, all 10 organisations were asked about the barriers for women accessing their service. Table 5 clearly shows two main concerns for women wanting to access a service. The first is that there are more men than women already using that service and they are therefore a minority:

> …the prospect of moving into a community that is predominantly male often just holds women back, they just won't, they won't look at it (service 6).
>
> …we've had cases where people have turned down the offer of a bed here saying no I don't want to be here with other men (service 7).
>
> …oh yeah, I've had women that have walked in and walked straight back out, they've refused to do a referral (service 5).

The second is that they may come into contact with ex-partner:

> …quite a lot of them have got a history of all sorts of different relationships so they're likely to bump into an ex (service 3).
>
> …we certainly have been mindful on a number of occasions of frictions, so sometimes there have been issues of domestic violence with other client users (service 9).

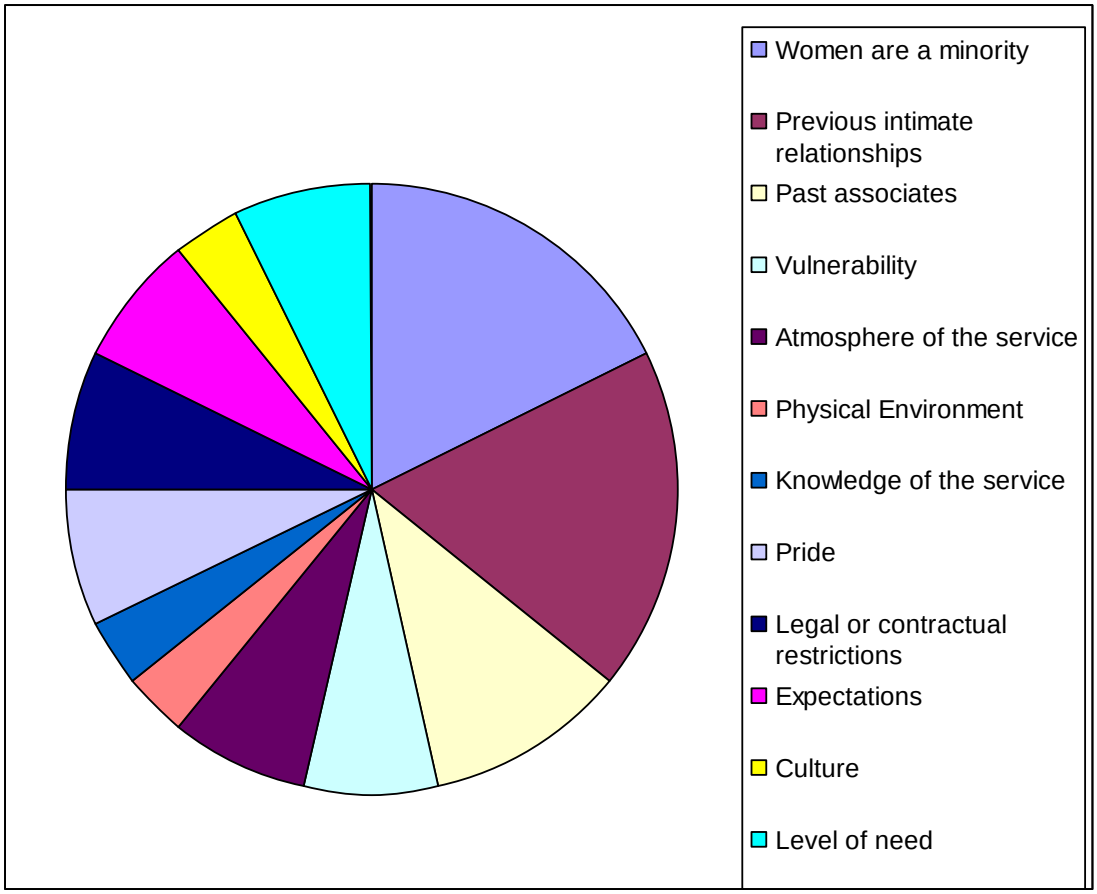

Table 5. Barriers for women accessing services.

In some cases the impact of other male users and past associations being able to access the same service has been grave on potential service users:

> … I had a girl here one time that was raped and it was by her Uncle and her Uncle actually came to the reception for a room and as soon as she spotted him she fell apart…to put her through that…she shouldn't have had to be exposed to them feelings (service 5).

The issue of culture or religion is one that is rarely spoken about in homeless literature but was highlighted by one of the services as a key reason for some women being unwilling or unable to stay in a mixed sex environment:

> …women have come with a family member who says 'I'm not leaving her here with all these men it's against our religion' (service 5).

There is no single female only accommodation available in the city in which the research is based. Single women will only be housed if they meet the criteria to be offered a statutory duty. If the mixed residential services are full or not appropriate then Bed and Breakfast accommodation is the most popular form of accommodation used. A report received from the local authority in the city in which the research is based shows that women make up over 75 percent of all single people accommodated in B&B's between April 2013 and August 2013. It also shows that often the number is over 90 percent and at any one time there is usually around 11-13 single homeless women accommodated in this way (report 2013). Services are concerned that if they are unable to house the women 'who do we send them to?' (Service 1).

The data therefore demonstrates that the service design could act as a barrier for women wanting to use their service, yet not for all women. The next part of this chapter will look more closely at the women who had managed to supersede the barriers discussed and their support needs.

4.2.5 How many women are the services working with?

The number of women supported by each service varied widely, and for some this was not related to organisational capacity but due to some of the reasons drawn attention to above. Table 6 shows the number of women supported by each service. These are not directly comparable as all the statistics differed in the time frame they were taken from. Table 3 shows that nine out of the 10 services that participated in this study also worked with men, in all of these nine the number of women they supported was much lower compared to the number of men. Furthermore the number of women now supported by these services had stayed the same for 70 percent of organisations in the last three years and risen in the remaining 30 percent.

Service Number	Female Supported
1	61 at any one time, 89 in one month (including some young women under 18)
2	Unknown
3	Up to 4 in any one drop-in
4	40 in a month
5	5 at one time
6	2 (most they have had in three years)
7	Up to 6 at any one time
8	62 in one year
9	192
10	35

Table 6. Number of women supported by each service

4.2.6 Concerns for single homeless women as seen by services

Thirty different concerns were revealed in discussions with services including issues such as learning difficulties, legislation, recurring homelessness and friendship groups or associations, please see Table 7 for more detail. Eleven of these concerns were emphasised as being different for women. I have broken down the most frequently declared concerns for further discussion here and will discuss those highlighted as gender dependant next.

Need identified	No of services agreed
Not having a statutory duty owed	1
Relationship Breakdown	5
Hidden Homelessness	3
Being in intimate relationships	1
Domestic Abuse	5
Drugs	6
Alcohol	6
Lack of safe accommodation	2
Life experiences	2
Financial situation	3
Having children not living with them	4
Vulnerability	2
Welfare Reform	3
Less accommodation for women	6
Chaotic lifestyle	1
Sex work	2
Recurring homelessness	1
Ability to engage	2
No female only accommodation	5
Self confidence	2
Smoking	1
Associations	1
Judgemental Society	5
Learning Difficulties	3
Mental Health	5
Low literacy	1
Different expectations to men	2
Emotional needs	3
Culture	3
Care leavers	1

Table 7. Concerns for women as identified by services

4.2.6.1 General concerns

Fifty percent of the organisations stated that relationship breakdown was the biggest cause of homelessness for single homeless women:

> …the number one issue for women is relationship breakdown (service 5).

Relationship breakdown has been highlighted by all of the major homeless campaign groups such as Shelter and Homeless Link as the biggest single cause of homelessness. St Mungo's ran a campaign in 2007 which demonstrated that relationship breakdown remained the 'primary

reason' for homelessness and that 41 percent of their residents gave it as their reason for being homeless (St Mungo's, 2007).

Substance misuse was also considered an important battle for the women they supported by 60 percent of the services interviewed, although again it was not differentiated as a female only problem:

> …the drugs and drink issues are fairly similar and probably in about the same proportion (service 3).

Crisis supports this evidence and showed that both genders were 'equally as likely' to be dependent on substances. They also argued that women and men were susceptible to sleeping rough, to having had a 'disrupted education' and to being long term unemployed and therefore dependant on benefits (2011: 19).

Dwyer et al (2011) agreed these similarities in their study on multiple exclusion homelessness (MEH). They also reported differences between male and female homelessness citing several studies that found homeless women had higher rates of 'major mental illness…more difficulty in current life circumstances…more chronic health problems…and a higher rate of attempted suicide' than men (p494).

Poor mental health in the women supported was raised by five out of the 10 services, and although they all conceded that this was not a solely female issue some of the services included in the mapping study felt that it manifested itself in different ways:

> …men tend to have experienced mental health before; women say 'never felt that low before, I've never had depression but the Dr's telling me I'm depressed' (service 5).

4.2.6.2 Gender specific concerns

As stated previously 11 of the concerns were identified as being different due to gender. Seven out of the nine services working with both men and women, and therefore able to compare, stated that single homeless women's needs were different to those of men. One of the other two organisations felt they didn't know and one service did not answer the question in interview.

The lack of female homelessness provision within the city was the largest need identified by participants for single homeless women. Sixty percent of the services I spoke to said this was the biggest problem facing women who find themselves homeless in this city today:

> …safe accommodation [in response to – what do you think is the biggest challenge for single homeless women] (service 3)
> … the lack of accommodation makes it sometimes impossible for women to have appropriate accommodation (service 4)
> …there just simply at the moment isn't enough supply of properties' (service 8).

Furthermore five out of 10 services felt that the type of accommodation that was on offer was in itself a difficulty faced by single homeless women and that there is a lack of female only provision was a major concern. Only one of the 22 services identified as working with the homeless population in the city provided services solely for women. Although we have discussed this element within barriers to current services, this was also mentioned by half of the services as a requirement to support single homeless women appropriately:

> …[support] should be provided by and for women (service 1)
> …[a lot of the women have had] a difficult relationship with males…to feel that they have a safe haven where they can close a door and they decide what's going to happen within that environment (service 4)
> …I don't think they should have to share with men (service 5)

Organisations views are supported by the literature. Reeve, Casey and Goudie (2006) found that women preferred an informal service, easily accessible, offering 'women-only space' and being 'like home' (p70). St Mungo's support these finding reporting that women 'value clean, private, safe and homely accommodation' (St Mungo's, 2011).

The existence of domestic abuse in the women's relationships was a common concern shared in this study. Half of the services reporting that the women they support had disclosed domestic or sexual abuse in a previous relationship and at times traits of exploitation:

> …sometimes there are issues because of domestic violence (service 9)
> …men hold a lot of the power…so even the women who are in relationships a lot of…the pimps for example are their boyfriends (service 9)
> …obviously you get more domestic violence stuff with females (service 3)

Research supports the view that women 'are much more likely than men to have had histories of sexual or physical abuse' (Tomas and Dittmar, 1995:494) and that violence within relationships is a factor leading to homelessness more specifically for women (McNaughton and Saunders, 2007, cited in Henry et al, 2010). Under the 1996 Housing Act and the Homelessness Act 2002 people fleeing domestic violence were 'owed a duty of care' from the local authority. In theory this meant that domestic violence should not result in homelessness, however all the studies included here described violence in the home as being a contributory factor to female homelessness.

The services also stated that a major barrier and challenge for women who find themselves homeless is the stigma attached to female homelessness by society as a whole:

> …society really sees women as family people and if you don't manage to fulfil that role there's a lot of anxiety and poor self-esteem as a result of that (service 9)
> …they tend to hold it very dear that they're homeless and they're on their own and sometimes they feel embarrassed cause they haven't told their family and things like that (service 5)

As discussed in Chapter 2 homeless women face stigma preventing them from being able to access much needed support for fear that this will make them more visible (Watson, 1999). This stigma is highlighted in the media and in fiction where women in the homeless population are often portrayed in a negative image, regularly linked to prostitution or depicted as vulnerable young girls or old bag ladies.

Four of the organisations also argued that the stigma received by women went beyond the issue of homelessness and was linked to the fact that many of them are mothers who do not have their children living with them; furthermore it was felt by some of the services that women dealt with this issue differently to men. Being a parent was in this way highlighted as a

concern for women who are homeless as it was reported by organisations that it impacted significantly on their experience:

> …with a lot of the women there's children involved as well and I don't know if it's that maternal thing cause they're mums where men, I'm not being prejudiced but a lot of men are just used to leaving the kids behind and going on with their lives (service 5)
> …having children not with them, a woman still worries even though they're not with her (service 6)
> …a lot of them are parents (service 9)

It is argued in the literature that female homelessness often equates to hidden homelessness; women will avoid activities that make them visible when homeless such as begging in a bid to remain hidden (May et al, 2007). Being judged in the manner above may begin to explain why there has been an unwillingness to seek, find and accept women as homeless historically in both literature and legislation.

Three of the 10 services commented on their homeless female clients desire to remain hidden:

> …there's a lot of sofa surfing…it's such a common experience there's this feeling of we've all been there (service 4)
> …women's homelessness is very different, generally speaking its hidden homelessness in the sense that they're actually just going from one place to another, one relationship to another (service 3)
> …women are better at just finding someone's couch to sleep on rather than just going to a hostel (service 1)

The three services referred to above also demonstrate methods used by women to remain hidden such as a reliance on friends and family to 'sofa surf' and on their partners to support them, even if this relationship was dangerous and unsuitable. As highlighted in Chapter 2 these examples were also apparent in the literature where a desire to remain hidden was apparent with women using methods such as forming unwanted sexual relationships (twice as much as men) or engaging in sex work (20 percent of women compared to three percent of men) (50: Crisis, 2011).

The financial dependency on others of the women supported by the services interviewed was of particular concern to three of the organisations and was highlighted as a difference between women and men in the data collected:

> …often their finances are different as well because of where, they may have come out of bad relationships in the past you know (service 6)
>
> …if they've been in relationships, I know like especially with the ethnicity women they've been at home and their husbands have provided everything for them (service 5)

The evidence presented above shows recognition of the different experiences of single homeless females compared to men in the city and the differing concerns held for the women by supporting agencies. The next section looks at how and if these differences are addressed in the support they are offered.

4.2.7 Are women supported differently?

Despite the above recognition of uniqueness in female experience and needs, seven of the nine services that also support men stated that they work with women in the same way.

Two services that believed they worked with women differently did so in different ways. One was a health service and targeted females specifically in women only drop-ins and are trained in female health concerns such as maternity and female sexual health. The other worked by a policy that only female staff would work with women clients and stated they were 'more fussy about that than most agencies' (service 3).

Working with women in the same way seemed to mean for all seven organisations offering the same access routes, the same types of service, completing the same support plans and not offering women anything different to men. Of these seven services, four felt that women engaged differently in their time with them:

> …I think it's quite unusual that we have a single homeless woman that interacts with us much (service 2)
>
> …women are more keen to leave than men (service 5)

…more difficult for women to engage at the beginning (service 1)

The one service that felt overall women engaged in the same way with their service to men had previously said that there were differences in the needs of the women they supported and they did acknowledge in interview different ways that engagement can differ on an individual basis for women:

…A little bit longer to rebuild their self-confidence (service 7)

The other two services did not comment on the issue of female engagement but one did highlight difference in engagement in their discussion about future changes, which would require them not to take referrals directly:

…women may be more reticent to divulge if things are going on at home (service 10)

Furthermore upon analysis of the data, it appears that several of the seven services that said they worked with women in the same way may actually differentiate the service they offer to women than that offered to men. Comments shown below demonstrate subtle ways in which the distinction between working with homeless men and women was made:

…women's cluster is completely separate (service 5)
…obviously we would never put the women on the van to carry the furniture (service 6)
we have had to deal with a couple of safeguarding issues with our female clients (service 7)

These subtleties could be due to the attitudes towards female homelessness in the services interviewed. Eight out of the 10 services stated in interview that they believed single homeless women to be more vulnerable than their male counterparts:

…the vulnerability that they have compared to men is different (service 6)
…a woman by her general gender make up is more, generally needs more reassurance, more comfort, more security than a man (service 3)

> …the women that come in on their own…they worry me, I go home and worry about them (service 2)

This contradiction between the statements made by staff and the nuances established here demonstrate that the methods used to differentiate by employees between male and female homeless service users is evidently not supported by the majority of services through organisational policy. This finding is also supported by the fact that only two services could say they attended female specific training in their role and one of these was the health service. The next part of the chapter will consider the more general landscape that the women are dependent on, in particular how the changes in the welfare system have impacted on this sector of the homeless population.

4.3 Welfare Reform

4.3.1 Services on welfare reform

This mapping study was conducted to better understand the landscape that single homeless women are surviving in. I have previously argued in my literature review that services play a huge part in that landscape for these women but also making a significant contribution is the wider social and political context. Since 2010 this has changed dramatically with the austerity measures taken by a new government and the welfare reform.

The organisations spoke about three main aspects of welfare reform that they had witnessed affecting their client group. These were the benefit sanctions, the introduction of the 'bedroom tax' and the changes to the local housing allowance (LHA) – most notably the rise in age of eligibility, from 25 to 35, to receive more than the shared room rate. All of these factors are presented below with evidence taken from interviews.

4.3.1.1 Benefit sanctions

Benefit sanctions were the most frequently cited concern by services for their service users:

> …sanctions are a nightmare…just horrific (service 2)
>
> …we're having a huge amount of our clients who are on jobseekers getting sanctions (service 1)

…There's so much sanctions going on that's never gone on before, they seem to sanction everyone for everything all the time (service 5)

Recent research has shown that the frequency and severity of benefit sanctions have increased and that the conditionality criteria applied to sanction giving has been expanded (JRF 2014: 1, Johnsen et al 2014: 2, Webster 2014: 4). It now includes single parents and disabled people meaning that more of the population are at risk of a stop in their benefits. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF, 2014) also found that homeless people were being severely affected (1). The literature review showed one-fifth of women's income comes from benefits, double the amount claimed by men, allowing us to assume that the outcome for women will be disproportionate.

The impact of benefit sanctions were described by services in this mapping study as more far reaching than being without expendable cash and the obvious consequences of being without money on a day to day basis for a period of time were highlighted. These included being unable to afford food and bills, being unable to travel to appointments and to meet the requirements of the local job centres and being unable to fund social activities:

… they can't pay their rent they can't buy food (service 5)

…we've got more people coming in here…asking for food parcels (service 3)

…no benefits means no housing benefit…how do you support somebody that has no finance whatsoever and they can't eat (service 7)

4.3.1.2 Bedroom tax

Placing further pressure on services and homeless single females is the so called 'bedroom tax'. Half of the services spoken to agree that the additional payment requested for spare bedrooms had impacted on their service users, particularly in trying to find future suitable long term accommodation:

…women want a two bedroom house so children can come and stay with them (service 5)

…the big one was the bedroom tax, the under occupancy penalty…there's a lack of one bedroom properties in the city…they have arrears so they can't move (service 4)

…there's less choice for them (service 7)

Services also gave examples of individuals they had previously supported to become settled in the community that had since returned to them as they were unable to pay towards a second bedroom. Previously before the introduction of this tax certain two bedroom properties, often those less popular with families or offering more affordable rents, were made available to single people meaning unexpected additional payments needed to be made with the introduction of this tax. Other organisations told of individuals already in debt to a housing association, these individuals are being denied a move into a smaller property which would remove the requirement to pay the tax, until this debt can be repaid. This instead is resulting in the debt increasing which in turn could lead to eviction and homelessness. The bedroom tax in particular was reported as an impact more specifically for the mothers who no longer have care of their children:

> …what happens with some of the women is that they've had children and then children have been taken away from them but they're still in a property with two bedrooms, they're desperate to move out of that property but they can't do that because there are hardly any one bedroom properties around (service 9)

4.3.1.3 Under 35's shared room rate

The issue of the supply of accommodation being reduced for this population through the changes in the welfare system was raised again by two services that expressed concern about the revised regulations to the shared room rate. Single homeless women looking to move into private accommodation are now only eligible for the shared room rate up until the age of 35.

> …there are young people's services up to 25 but from there to 35…we aren't [managing that] we just can't offer them accommodation (service 3)

This reduction in long term accommodation combined with the concerns referred to earlier regarding the lack of safe temporary accommodation highlights the question where do single homeless women go?

4.3.1.4 Future changes

Future planned changes (at the time of the data collection) to the welfare system include the introduction of the Universal Credit. Although the impact of these changes cannot be measured here there was a feeling of fear and an expression of concern expressed in 40 percent of the participants included in this study:

> …we are *dreading* Universal Credit coming in because I just do not – ours are not good payers, they're not very good at managing their money, they continually get stuck with their benefits, money just does not last (service 9)
>
> …I think that will have a massive impact because I think women will really struggle to have a monthly budget, so week one they'll be fine and the rest of the weeks two, three, four they'll see a massive shortfall (service 4)

The genuine concern for their service users from the participants was clear and the data collected demonstrates that services feel the changes in the welfare system are producing obstacles that are specific to the vulnerable and vulnerably housed or homeless population:

> …because of the support charges our rents in supported accommodation are quite high so we've got a big problem because we've got to support people to get into work but at the same time if they get into work then they can't afford to live with us (service 1)
>
> …it always seems that those who are the most vulnerable and that need the most support will be the first ones who are affected by cuts and by changes (service 4)
>
> …benefits at the moment it's a nightmare…it's the vulnerable people who are being penalised (service 5)

Furthermore it shows the changes as a whole were impacting on service users negatively:

> …It's [welfare reform] the only thing that's changed in our climate that can really be having that kind of impact on the increase of street sex working (service 4)

Despite this apparent negative effect, three organisations reported women were 'ignorant' (service 3) of many of the changes:

> …don't seem to care [about Universal Credit]…they just seem to think whatever's asked of them they have to comply with cause they want the money (service 5)

None of the participants reported that welfare reform was an issue that their service users were talking to them about.

4.4 Influencing the wider research

Although there is a general acceptance in contemporary research that women are part of the homeless population, studies have primarily focused on men as they have been the most visible (6: Jones, 1999). The data presented here confirms that the issue of female homelessness is a very real one causing great concern to those working to support the homeless population and reduce homelessness overall. Services are central to the solution to homelessness yet there is a dearth of knowledge on how women experience them. This mapping study suggests the views of the professionals from organisations working with women and had two purposes within this thesis. Firstly, it was used to highlight areas for inquiry within the primary research conducted with single homeless females and secondly it proved useful in examining the findings of that primary research. Comparisons between the two pieces of field research are presented in Chapter 6 and make for interesting points of discussion.

This mapping study sought to understand the part services played in supporting homeless women, it recognises the organisations influential position in changing the trajectory of many of these women's lives, something that has been absent in previous research. By considering the support women receive in the city being investigated and identifying the concerns for both the women and the services this research will further knowledge on what works and what does not in supporting single homeless women.

The mapping study showed the biggest concerns expressed by services were the reduction in long term accommodation in the city and the lack of safe temporary accommodation for single homeless females. This highlights the question where do single homeless women go when they need accommodation? This question was asked of the female participants participating in the wider study and the findings are presented in Chapter 5. Furthermore, services were concerned that the support currently on offer was largely of mixed gender. Opposing arguments can be found in the research for what women want. Several arguments for women only services have been made, the most predominant being the need for women to feel safe and welcome (Henry et al, 2010 and Reeve, Casey and Goudie, 2006). Other research has shown that women would prefer to stay in mixed accommodation if given a choice (66: Jones, 1999).

The data presented here overwhelmingly supports the view that single women's experiences of homelessness are different to single males giving examples of differing concerns, attitudes and methods of working. However, the evidence given also suggests this view is not supported by the majority of services through organisational policy. This finding is maintained by the fact that only two services could say they attended female specific training in their role and one of these was the health service. Chapter 2 presented evidence for homeless women's desire to remain hidden and high numbers of women subject to domestic abuse which also demonstrates two further findings of the mapping study. Despite the lack of training surrounding female homelessness both of these findings point to a need to recognise that gender does influence single women's experience of homelessness (May et al, 2007, Crisis, 2008 and 2011, McNaughton and Saunders (2007) in Henry et al, 2010, Tomas and Dittmar, 1995).

In keeping with the findings in the literature (Williams 2010, Fondeville and Ward, 2011) there was no one clear definition of homelessness amongst the services included in this mapping study. Although a generic understanding of homelessness to be without a home was agreed, more specific types of homelessness were not. Some services considered staying with friends as being homeless, where others considered only those who were rough sleeping as homeless. Most accommodation services considered their residence homeless, whereas one (service 6) although declared their residents homeless in official documentation believed the label to be detrimental and therefore refused to refer to their service users as homeless once they were resident with them. Furthermore, criteria for services influenced this definition at times where only 'statutorily homeless' individuals could be supported. This lack of uniformity in definitions could mean confusion in identity for homeless females themselves.

The size of the issue of female homelessness is hard to measure, and the figures given by the services interviews were not able to clarify the situation in this city. All of the services used different methods of recording and as discussed above different definitions to record by which affected the numbers; as shown in table 5. This would result in the city being unable to gather reliable information about the number of homeless women requiring support. The services offered to women could therefore be potentially unsuitable and ineffective. The women's

perspective on how they have experienced these services was again examined in the field research with single homeless women with findings revealed in Chapter 5.

Finally the mapping study shows three main changes and one potential future change that it is of great concern to services regarding the welfare reform. The impact of these changes were considered to be rising numbers of homelessness, more difficult exit strategies for the homeless population and addition to the chaotic lives already existing for some service users. None of the services however reported that their service users had expressed concerns about the welfare reform, this finding was used to inform field research with women who were asked how and if the changes were impacting on them and whether they effected their homeless experience. These findings are presented in the next chapter where the field research with homeless women is examined and analysed.

Chapter 5: Missing voices, Missed opportunities

The data collection process with homeless women, at times, affected my confidence. Throughout the process I questioned my own knowledge on the subjects of homelessness, services and the research process. I felt fear that I would not be able to do justice to the participants and fear that I was missing something as a practitioner, that could offer support, and missing something as a researcher, that was key to the findings

It also had more of a profound effect on my emotions than I had expected. I found myself identifying with parts of each of the women I spoke to, as a woman and what that means for people's expectations, as a mother-to-be (at that time) and the different perspective that can give and as a person who has faced loss and how that can change your world.

I found myself imagining how my own life could have and probably would have been very different if I had made different choices, or didn't have my network of support especially as a woman living in the same city at the same time. The shocking reality of just how easy it is to fall into homelessness was apparent within each of the stories told. There were times I wished I could do more and there were times when I stopped the interviews due to fears around safeguarding. I hope the power of these stories and personal truths are apparent in their interpretation.

5.1 Introduction

The methodological approaches and process of data analysis was previously discussed in Chapter 3. Here I present the findings. Due to the personal nature of the narratives gathered the question of how to do this sensitively and adequately created dilemmas. Questions around how narratives could be broken down to create themes and ensure they are fully addressed without losing the powerfulness of the women's own words arose early on.

'The best way to present findings from life histories…depends largely on the audience for whom it is intended' (Ojermark, 2007). This in itself created a problem for me, writing this thesis for an academic audience, was of course a priority, but the impact of its findings on the homeless community could also be important. Two different audiences and two different purposes. After much trial and error a 'constructionist' approach was adopted. You will see in this chapter that the women's narratives remain verbatim and the analysis has focused on the subjective meaning and the joint process of gathering the narrative rather than the 'objective' meaning that some other researchers may have adopted.

This chapter first brings together the women's narratives and then addresses the main themes discovered, these are unified under headings giving a basis for further examination in Chapter 6.

5.2 Stories of homelessness: meet the women

An overview of the women who participated in this study has been provided in Chapter 3, but to remain true to narrative methodology and to ensure that the women's words could be heard and understood through their perspective I felt a more detailed account of their life histories and circumstances was required. Timelines were an important part of the data collection process in this research and mapping the women's service use history went hand in hand in mapping their life stories. To truly appreciate the women's narratives, views and perspectives and to ensure that the reader comprehends the women's viewpoints these cannot be ignored and therefore a greater insight than the previously given overview is offered here.

Furthermore, I felt that the overview alone did not give readers a true understanding of the varied and life changing homeless experiences that these women shared. To appreciate women's homelessness in more depth, an account of the complexity of these women's lives and the multiple dimensions in which they exist needs to first be provided. Below is an introduction to each of the women in turn and a deeper insight into their histories.

Debbie

Debbie is in her early forties and has been homeless on and off since she went into care at the age of 13. She is local to the area that the research was conducted and yet only in the last six months had approached a service she identified as being for the homeless. A mum of one with four grandchildren her aim is to find a property she can settle down in and have her grandchildren to visit.

Debbie went into care because of the concerns raised when she frequently ran away from home due to the physical abuse she suffered at the hands of her father when he was drinking. In care she describes herself as *'a little bugger'* and says that she ran away regularly staying with friends. This starts a pattern that can be seen throughout her lifetime so far. After leaving care and having her son at aged 17 she acquired her first tenancy with her partner at the time.

This was an abusive relationship that lasted 10 years. The first tenancy broke down due to drug use and they moved to their second tenancy together. They had to leave this tenancy due to threats to her partner and both relied on sofa surfing with friends and family and the relationship ended. In a new relationship Debbie moved into a new tenancy ran by a social landlord. Her son, new partner and his father stayed with her until she went into prison. Her partner and his Dad stayed at her property but on her release nine months later she had lost her tenancy due to rent arrears as no housing benefit claims had been made in her absence and once again she relied on friends and family.

A private tenancy was next sought through her GP – a local GP service for the homeless and vulnerably housed – who introduced her to a private landlord. Debbie then got into a new relationship with a man she later married and moved to a neighbouring town giving up her own tenancy. When the marriage broke down Debbie maintained the tenancy but had to leave after an incident with a guest of hers and the landlord – *'It's my own fault really, being silly, letting people in my house'*. Once again sofa surfing was necessary.

Debbie explains that she has 'sofa surfed' for four years, normally with her new partner. This had only stopped six months ago when she accessed the service she was currently using through their rough sleeper team. Although even in the last six months she described periods of sofa surfing, for example when she left the service to find her partner who had left and she became ill.

Despite a long history of homelessness Debbie states she wouldn't class herself as homeless:

> *'I've been on and off homeless for years, but I've always had somewhere to go if you know what I mean, so I couldn't class myself…'*

Debbie also explains about a long history of drug use that really got worse in her early twenties when she first started using '*harder'* drugs such as *'heroin and crack'*. More recently in addition alcohol has become a problem too. This lifestyle has led to several spells in prison over the years – *'I've been in prison a lot'*. In conjunction she has suffered long periods of ill health having TB, pneumonia and a previous heart operation.

Debbie feels that her time in care and prison has helped her in her current situation living in accommodation for the homeless *'cause I've been used to care and stuff it don't really bother*

me'. She describes some difficulties she has experienced in the accommodation but states that ultimately *'they put [me] up'.* Other services that work with the homeless such as her GP, the substance misuse team and the private landlord she worked with are not considered as a homeless service by Debbie and no other services were approached.

Lucy

Lucy, aged 51, had been homeless throughout her lifetime, as a child, a mother, a partner and a single woman. Perhaps out of all the women she had the most complex history and extensive use of homeless services in the city. I spoke to her as a single homeless woman residing in mixed homeless accommodation. Originally from the North of England she came to the City in which the research is based many years before with her children, a son and a daughter, after running up debts with local drug dealers and having to leave her home town in fear of her and her family's safety.

When she first arrived in the city her move was managed through an organisation in her home town. They put her in touch with a local charity and she was originally placed in a women's refuge with her children for her and their safety. She was later evicted from the refuge due to complaints from her neighbours – *'they said it was sex, drugs and rock and roll'* – although she insists the reality was much more mundane.

Lucy found a private tenancy with her ex-partner who had returned in her and her children's lives, and had been part of the reason for the eviction. The tenancy was an emergency find through friends and was in poor condition – *'there were no windows in there, no gas, no electric'.* Due to the necessity to find accommodation however Lucy felt *she 'had no other choice so me and my family moved there'.* To support the family in the move local charities selling cheap furniture were used. Shortly after the family moved into another property owned by the same 'landlord' and stayed there for four years.

Due to domestic violence this tenancy broke down and Lucy describes how the 'landlord' – a friend of her partners *'made it hard'* for her to stay in the tenancy. She moved with her daughter into a homeless hostel in the city before they organised for her to move into a property owned by the local authority. At this point Lucy *'ended up back on the drugs'* and this property *'got took over by drug dealers'.*

Aware that things needed to change Lucy approached another homeless service in the city a charity whom she described as *'very, very helpful'* and once again the family were moved into a hostel, this time out of the city, until a property in the city could be found. This accommodation was with a private landlord.

Problems with neighbours were a factor in this accommodation and her daughter was threatened with a knife. The two sought refuge with the domestic violence charity they had previously been evicted from and once again she had to leave the town they called home and move into a hostel. Lucy believes that this move out of the city was constructed *'cause it was me'* (because the service did not like her due to their previous history). The move came to an end because of a breakdown with relationships with other residents. The mother and daughter duo moved back into the private tenancy they had left due to concerns for their safety – *'made me move back to the house where I was having trouble*'. Approaching the council for a second time she was told they could not help her because of debts and the problems in her previous tenancy with them. Lucy returned to her previous relationship and together they moved into a private tenancy and her daughter moved out as she was pregnant.

Once again, when she returned to her partner, domestic violence and a chaotic lifestyle that included drugs and alcohol ensued and Lucy ended up back in prison. On leaving prison she approached the '*very, very helpful*' charity she had used previously and was supported to move into a small hostel/shared house alone. At this point Lucy describes how she felt –

> *'I were low…I mean it, sometimes I couldn't be bothered showering for days, erm I'd just sit and cry when me kids weren't around when I were on my own and that, and in fact I were at rock bottom. I didn't know who to turn to, I didn't know who to talk to'*

This accommodation soon changed due to a poor relationship with the other resident at the time who threatened to harm her – *'I used to put my wardrobe to my bedroom door and that'.* The service moved her into another property they owned in which Lucy shared with a man – *'I get on with men better than I do with women'*.

Yet again domestic violence reoccurred when her ex-partner found out where she lived and Lucy did not feel safe. Around the same time she had met a new partner and decided to move in with him. Together they sofa surfed staying at different friends but a lot of these properties

were not suitable and again she declared herself homeless to the local authority. They placed her on her own in a local B&B until a property could be found. Once Lucy was offered a property the charity whom she had maintained a relationship with supported her to organise bills, furniture, financing and budgeting. For a while Lucy was settled here. But drugs and alcohol were still a part of her life.

Lucy returned to prison for shoplifting and assault, whilst in prison she accrued rent arrears and on release lost this property – *'Me flat were beautiful Linda, and it broke my heart. I lost everything'.* Released from prison without an address she stayed with her daughter before being placed in a hostel through a charity in the city known for supporting women involved in sex work. The hostel is described by Lucy as *'Bloody disgusting'* and she describes scenes of drug use, alcoholism, crime and desperation – *'People have to live in there 'cause they've nowhere to live'*. From this hostel Lucy moved into the hostel she is currently in and has been residing there for the past two months. She is feeling optimistic about her current situation and talks of her dreams for *'a nice little granny flat or something…[where I can] just lock myself away from the world and live my life'.*

Lucy has also been supported throughout her time in the city by a GP service specifically for the homeless and vulnerably housed, alcohol and substance misuse services and other local charities whom she shares her experiences of. At the time of the final interview her daughter had also moved into the hostel she was staying in, her account of this was positive and adds another element to this research.

Jackie

Jackie is a woman in her late thirties who tells me that she became homeless for the first time about five years ago. Originally from the North West, where she managed her own tenancy, she moved from there to live with her parents and her son elsewhere in the UK. When her son stole from her father both he and her had to move out. Her son had previously been in foster care and there was social services involvement, he therefore was returned to foster care and Jackie found herself sofa surfing.

After some time sofa surfing she moved to the city in which the research took place with her ex-partner and stayed with his brother for about six weeks. In that time he found

accommodation through the probation service in a bail hostel and left her homeless on her own again. Jackie spoke in the interview about how she got a tent at this point and lived in it in a local common area for around two months before gaining support and direction from local services.

Jackie explained that she has previously used both drugs, mainly heroin, and alcohol in the past but at the time of the interview was abstinent from both. On coming to the city she had accessed support from the local substance misuse team. When she was living in the tent it was they who signposted her to a local charity that offered her a room in a '*lovely hostel',* at the time for older single women, and she stayed there for some time. She had already been to the local authority whom she described as *'no help whatsoever'*. Through the local charity she gained a council flat and she has lived there for the past three years but faces eviction due to anti-social behaviour. Jackie tells of how she allowed her son and his girlfriend to stay with her and how they have caused *'chaos'*, she does not deny the anti-social behaviour but said it had stopped now that they had left. She describes her feelings clearly about her situation at the time of interview –

> *'I am afraid of being homeless now in (the city in which the research has been conducted) because I do know that there's nothing out there and especially for women of my age'*

Jackie was using another registered charity offering food, support, a washing service and phone line to gain support with her current predicament when the interview took place. She was highly emotional about her current situation and able to grasp the severity of her situation. Unfortunately Jackie only took part in the first stage interview as due to her situation she did not attend the service again in the time that interviews were taking place.

Christine

Christine is a woman in her early thirties, born into the travelling community she settled with her mother and father at the age of seven. She was raised still with a connection to the travelling community through her extended family. She grew up and lived in the North West of England and had only been in the city in which the research took place for three months at the time of the interview where she was staying in a mixed sex, couples and rough sleeper's hostel. She had come to the hostel as she was fleeing her abusive ex-husband who had recently been released from prison (for a non-related offence). She tells the story of a

particularly violent encounter where her ex-husband and his sisters had beaten her with a hammer and described this as her turning point. She tells me that although this was reported to the police he was never convicted of this offence. The marriage had begun when Christine was 18 years old and only lasted eighteen months, but she states that she has been running and hiding from him ever since. They had a daughter together whom she is still in contact with but who was *'signed over'* to her mother for her daughters own safety.

Christine stated in the interview that this is her first time homeless. She grew up in the family home and has at least two brothers who she mentions. When she married her husband they lived in a caravan and she re-joined the travelling community that he was a part of. When this marriage broke down she moved back in with her family where she spent many years. Before coming to this city she lived in private landlord accommodation, firstly a three bedroom house with her brothers, but when they left and the bedroom tax came into force the council would no longer cover the rent. The landlord then moved her into a two bedroom house, but this also could not be funded and she had to move out and back in with family until she was advised to flee by the police; she chose this city as she has relatives buried here.

On coming to a city she did not know Christine went directly to the council where she spoke to the homeless team. They directed her to the hostel I spoke to her in but incorrectly gave her a form for B&B accommodation. On arriving at the B&B in the evening she was told that she could not stay as the paperwork was incorrect. Christine tells how upset she was at the news but how the lady who ran the B&B saw this and allowed her to stay that night. After that the same lady showed her how to get to the hostel and she has been there for the past few months, starting in a room on the ground floor with the rough sleepers and then at the time of interview staying in an upstairs room reserved for longer (up to three months) stays, Christine describes how this made her feel *'I've been promoted!'*. At no time prior to accessing this hostel was domestic abuse refuges discussed with her. Christine is now working voluntarily in the hostels kitchen *'I need it for my CV'* and has plans to *'try and get a job'* and settle in the city. However she is currently speaking with the local authority to see if they will fund her stay as she has no clear local connection to the area.

Christine also discussed some of the other challenges she faced such as drug abuse and depression, explaining that she was getting support for both but that this support was very separate to that which she was getting for her housing problem.

Kelly

Kelly is a woman in her early 50's born in the North of England, she came to the city in which the research was set six months before the interview took place. Her decision to leave North England where she describes herself as being *'dragged up'* came about in an effort to seek safety and comfort with a long term male friend. I met her when she was staying in a homeless hostel for both men, women, couples and rough sleepers. Her history of abuse is long and systematic and it began in childhood. She tells the story of the sexual abuse she suffered from the age of eight by her father, to her teen years where she was sexually abused by a family friend, brother and her stepfather. Her stepfather abused her from the age of 14 and continued to abuse her until her mid 20's. She had three daughters that were also his. Kelly also has a son, and she tells of how she got pregnant 'young' because she believes she was trying to 'escape' when her stepfather went into prison and met somebody but it did not last. Kelly explains that she was also married before but he was an alcoholic that was physically abusive. Since then she has been abused by family taking her money and taking advantage. She describes her life in the North of England:

'I was tret like an animal…I was something that were passed from person to person and they could do what they wanted with me, when they wanted, how they wanted, beat me when they wanted'

Kelly's accommodation history does not make for a much happier read. She grew up in children's homes but left those at the age of 15. She spent many years being supported by Women's Aid accommodation to get away from her stepfather but says she left those too because *'sometimes these places can get depressing'.* In her mid 20's she entered a psychiatric unit. With the support then of a social worker and psychiatrist she received her own accommodation in a council flat which she retained for many years. Throughout these accommodations and in managing her own tenancy Kelly has also been managing her mental and physical health. She describes numerous suicide attempts and considers herself to be a self-harmer but not to know when this will manifest itself as a suicide attempt. She takes

medication for her mental health and at the time of talking she informed me that these tablets were working and since moving to the city we were in she had not had serious episodes. Kelly says that she is currently the happiest she has been and that she '*feels like a person'* now that she has moved away from her abusers and has *'a life'*. However she also describes new stresses and worries. Having moved from outside of the city of her own volition she has to prove to the council a local connection to the area to be able to receive accommodation. She is currently arguing with the local authority about her inability to go 'home'. The stress of this she tells me has caused her health concerns to reappear (she has suffered several previous mini-strokes) and she has recently been admitted to hospital in a suspected episode which turned out to be a panic attack *'I thought I was having another stroke with the stress of it all'.*

Hannah

Hannah is 25 years of age and the daughter one of the other participants. She has experienced homelessness much of her life. She explains that she lived with her mum all of her life – apart from several periods of time in foster care –

'*They tried several time to put me in care. I hated it. I'd just kick off, hit them, run away, get drunk, they always let me go back. Nobody would have me'*

Moving in and out of supported accommodation throughout her childhood meant that she did not always go to school and she did not do too well in her exams.

Since the age of 17 she has lived alone. She originally moved out because she fell pregnant. Social services were involved with her baby from the moment she fell pregnant as she was known to them because of her experiences with her mum and that baby was eventually removed. She had another baby who passed away before they turned one and a third child who has also removed by social services and adopted to another family, against her will. At the time of the interviews Hannah was living in homeless accommodation for both men, women and rough sleepers. She had not lived there long but was pleased to be there. She felt she was used to hostel environments and therefore was quite comfortable –

'I don't mind it, I'm used to living with people, some days it's quite fun'

Her first property at aged 17 was a private tenancy. This property was given up later when she moved in with her partner. Her partner is still in her life now but the relationship has been on and off over the years. When they argued she would quite often stay with her Mum or friends and had spent weeks at a time sofa surfing – *'I always find somewhere to go'.*

Hannah has spent periods of time in prison for offences of anti-social behaviour and violence whilst under the influence of drink and drugs, her most recent was just before entering the hostel. Before this she lived in supported accommodation for people with mental ill health. Due to her behaviour there and rent arrears accrued from the service charge, she cannot return to this accommodation. Before this accommodation she was in prison and prior to that she had a local authority flat she loved. Her use of drugs and alcohol are described by her as casual, she goes *'on the sess'* (binge drinks/uses) rather than used consistently and can have long periods of abstinence. These binges however have impacted heavily on her life as these are the times she has found herself in trouble with the police or in her accommodation and relationships.

Hannah has found out about many of the services from her mother and is well known by most. She uses a variety for support and has had help in terms of accommodation, legal advice, budgeting, anger management, drugs, drink, mental health and parenting. This is the first time she identifies with using a service specifically for the homeless.

Bethany

Bethany is 19 years of age. She first became homeless eighteen months ago due to relationship breakdown. From a young age she was sexually abused by a family friend and eighteen months ago this became known to the police. In the last eighteen months she has faced police interviews, court cases and relived her abuse. Emotionally she says she is struggling.

Once the abuse came to light with the police (due to further allegations made by other victims) Bethany felt pressurised into telling her story –

'I had to didn't I, what if he did it to someone else? And she's younger than me [talking about one of the other victims] I couldn't let her do it by herself…I didn't really wanna though, I wish I didn't have to'

She tells me that she never fit in at home, maybe because of what was happening, but also because she has a different father to her siblings. She felt she never had as much attention and that she was the one that was always expected to have to do things around the house. She also tells me that she suspects her mum knew but never did anything as he was a friend of

hers. When the police found out she found it difficult manage her parents questions about what happened. She did not want her family in court, she did not want them at the police station –

'It's embarrassing, I didn't want them to know, I didn't want them to look at me different'

At around this time Bethany decided that she could not concentrate at college and that she needed to defer from her course for a year. She had intended to go back but at the point of interview had not. Due to the pressure all of this placed on the family as a whole and in particular her relationship with her mum she moved out even though she had nowhere else to go. This was not the first time. As a young teenager she had stayed periodically with other members of the family before returning home as the family struggled to manage their dynamics.

Firstly she stayed at a friend's house, before moving in with another friend in a more long term arrangement. However her finances were not yet arranged and this put pressure on their friendship and eventually this broke down. Contacting the local authority they advised a hostel and temporarily she lived in supported homeless accommodation before a local authority property was found. She admits that she *'took the first place [she] was offered…which was a mistake'.* The property was a flat in a notorious area of the city. There was little money to furnish the property and it was the first time she has been alone.

'I made friends with people upstairs, but they had this other mate, they were always round and then the other neighbours started moaning. They did terrorise them to be fair [laughing]. Now they say I'm out. I don't care, I don't wanna live there anyway'

Bethany is being evicted in the next two weeks. She has no idea where she is going to go.
As well as the local authority she is in contact with mental health services, community projects and other homeless charities in the city including the one at which we met.

Leah

Leah is 19 years of age. She has just moved into a local authority accommodation after a period of homelessness.

She was first homeless when she was 15 years old when she was 'kicked out' of the family home. She says that her and her mum just didn't get on. In the family home was her mum,

stepdad and younger brothers. She says that she was treated differently and that her stepdad was incredibly strict, stating that when she didn't stick to his rules he treated her like a child and her mum refused to defend her.

At 15 she stayed with her auntie and then with friends before she did eventually return home for a short period. Despite the relationship breakdown she insists that she is supported by family and is happy with their help. She then moved into a young person's accommodation but was evicted about four months ago for having a friend in the property who was not allowed to be there. She explains –

'I needed them there, I couldn't be there on my own after what happened they were protecting me. They let HIM in all the time, nobody stopped that'

Leah tells me she was sexually assaulted by a *'lad'* she thought was her friend. He hurt her badly. She told her friend and her mum made her report it to the police. A week later at a friend's house he turned up with his friends. Her friend told him to leave. He did, but his friends then returned and hit her and her friend with a glass bottle on the head and told her to stop *'lying and telling stories'*. After this she was frightened and went to the police about the physical assault. The *'lad'* however kept coming to the accommodation where she lived and that is why she had a friend there.

Since being evicted she has sofa surfed at various friends' houses, alternating between four of them. Her belongings are in the back of her friends car, when I asked if she was worried about that she replied, *'Oh no, I've told him if he needs to get rid of them he can'.* She states that she was not worried about ending up on the streets as somebody always let her stay. She said her sofa surfing experience was Ok despite explaining the following situation –

'I think he had mental health, he would just walk in as my mate would always leave the door open. This one time he walked in with a knife, he was off his head!'

Leah has been put in touch with different support agencies but has not taken up their support as she does not want to discuss her situation repeatedly and *'with strangers'.* She is currently in touch with the police, a support worker from the housing association and still attends college.

5.3 Analytical Reflection

5.3.1 Women AND survivors

"I was living with a man who was violent and so felt more safe and secure sleeping in a bin shed on my own than staying there. When you've got nothing, nothing matters."

St Mungo's Report on Women Homelessness 2014

The most frequent and standout theme featured in all of the narratives collected is the story told of abuse. It can be seen and heard in all its forms in the women's accounts of their homeless experiences. The studies included in the literature review for this thesis also demonstrate the link between domestic violence and female vulnerability and homelessness.

Domestic abuse has long been found to be a contributory factor for female homelessness, with researchers investigating this issue finding again and again that relationship breakdown linked to domestic violence is a noteworthy influence on women's housing and security (Anderson et al, 1993, Jones 1999, Thomas and Dittmar 1995). McNaughton and Saunders (2007) also present evidence that violence within relationships is a factor leading to homelessness more specifically for women (cited in Henry et al, 2010).

All of the women spoken to in this study disclosed their experiences of abuse; most commonly domestic abuse. However, the themes of abuse can be extended to include abuse subjected by wider family members, family friends, housemates and children, furthermore this research provides evidence that abuse was a recurring element in many of these women's lives.

Debbie was physically abused by her long term partner - *'I got battered for 10 years off him, that's why I ain't got no teeth here, cause he battered me with helmets and…'.* Debbie's experience of abuse spanned her lifetime, starting in her childhood when her father was physically abusive toward her when he drank. Women encountering more than one abusive relationship throughout their lifetime is a recognisable story not only in the literature but also amongst the women spoken to as part of this study (Tomas and Dittmar, 1995, Homeless Link 2017 (a) 2017, Bretherton and Pleace, 2018). Perhaps the familiarity of the relationship dynamics led to Debbie staying with a man whom so clearly hurt her, but also perhaps the violence was accepted as part of the 'lifestyle' Debbie was a part of; alcohol and drugs a large part of Debbie and her partners daily routine. Violence and substance misuse so frequently

come together that the acts and injuries may be easily excused and dismissed as 'one of those things'. For Debbie a past experience of abuse, the use of substances numbing reality and the certainty of facing life alone and homeless could add to explanations of fear and understanding as to why she stayed in an abusive relationship for such a long time.

Lucy also demonstrates evidence of different types of abuse. She was abused by her long term partner and father of her children – '*he beat me up',* she was taken advantage of by drug addicts that took over one of her properties and in one of the hostels she lived in she faced abuse from a fellow resident – *'do you know I could kill you in the night and nobody would know because none of my family knew where I were' (was a safe house).* Little knowledge was gained of Lucy's childhood and whether she experienced abuse, however in her adult life it is clear that abuse was a constant threat for her, her vulnerability being a need to house herself and her children, her addictions, her mental health and her homelessness. Like Debbie a familiar pattern of abuse, although in different domains was heard throughout her narrative. Lucy talks about feeling low when telling her story and the acceptance she has of the abusive experiences she has had seems at odds with her abrasive and defensive nature. For example Lucy at times was the perpetrator of abuse – to neighbours, housemates and the general public; on one occasion she was imprisoned for assault of a security guard attempting to apprehend her for alleged theft. However her sense of worthlessness and desperation to keep her children with her and safe are abundantly clear in her story and seem to be the reason that a woman so knowledgeable about services and her options may have suffered and received repeated incidents of abuse.

Jackie faced a different type of abuse. She was facing eviction at the time that we spoke due to her son and his girlfriend and their behaviour, she tells me *'they just took over my flat' 'they've caused nothing but chaos' 'my tenancy's being threatened…I'm just left there on my own'.* Due to her limited involvement in the research little is known about whether this is the only type of abuse Jackie experienced in her lifetime but this alone demonstrates the continued vulnerability of women, although at this point housed, who have experienced homelessness. Child to parent abuse has become more commonly discussed and recognised over the last 10 years (Holt, 2015). Conceivably it could be the mother-son relationship that made Jackie vulnerable in this instance, her need to provide for him and maintain a relationship for example, but an inability or powerlessness, even though risking her own safety, to prevent her

sons abusive behaviour is maybe easier to understand when assessing it in the context of the fragile nature of her new found stability due to her historical transient lifestyle. Perhaps as seen in the narratives of other women in this study also, the use of substances by her son and his girlfriend – and as materialised in information gathered after the interview – by herself, ensured that her susceptibility to abuse was heightened.

Christine was in an abusive relationship with her husband, they married when she was 18 and she says he was physically abusive from the start. Referring to the attack by her husband and his family she told me:

'I got attacked outside my house…they beat me with a hammer love…why do you think I've got no teeth? They broke my nose got all the side of my face'. After that Christine tells me that she *'just wanted peace'.*

'what my husband done to me he never got jail for it cause we were that frightened we never got him locked up, the police got involved and he might have got arrested that night but that were the end of it'

Christine's story of physical abuse was the most vehement spoken of in all of the narratives. The level of violence was extreme and sustained and the long lasting damage was physical and emotional. Although her marriage was short she had spent over 10 years fearing and eventually fleeing her perpetrator. Having to flee her family and hometown due to the violence and fear of recurrence she spoke about it with candour and anger. Unusually amongst the stories I heard, the authorities were informed – although only once the violence reached the levels described above. Fear seems to be the reason they were not spoken to earlier and once they were Christine did not feel they had supported her in preventing the abuse. On the surface Christine seemed to display less vulnerability to abuse in her refusal to accept it and in her determination to escape it, even culminating in signing her daughter over to her Mother. However she also shared themes of fear, depression and drug abuse all indicators of vulnerability.

Kelly talked the most about the abuse she had suffered from all different sources. Starting with her father it continued with a family friend, her siblings, her mum's new husband, her own husband and then extended family members. Here are just a selection of the things she told me:

'I was tret like an animal…I was something that were passed from person to person and they could do what they wanted with me, when they wanted, how they wanted, beat me when they wanted'

'From five years and up I were beaten and abused by my Dad and I was raped by two so called family friends, one man got prison, he got nine month in prison for raping me at eight year old'

'Other members of my family, I mean my brother had sexual intercourse with me [aged about 15]'

Referring to stepfather 'I…my Mum divorced from my Dad…and she remarried another man…and he abused me and messed around and I were in a children's home at the time when all that started…so I left that children's home about 15 but the abuse with him went on till I were roughly 23/24'

'I were too frightened to say anything'

Referring to Mum 'I'm not blaming [her] for anything, she were there when I got abused, raped by my stepdad, in the same room, but he used to beat and batter her up…I hated her for a long time'

'I've got three daughters to rape, that were to me Mums husband…but I couldn't talk to anybody else otherwise I'd have got beat up, I couldn't have a boyfriend, I couldn't get away'

Most recent relationship – 'I weren't physically abused in that relationship it were mentally and my heads in such a mess'

'I've got family that take money off me, I am very, very, very vulnerable'

Kelly discussed the most disturbing account of recurring abuse of all the women in this study. It was hard not to feel shock and sadness for her as she spoke of the many different people who had abused her and the different methods they had applied, however it was also clear that she had a real need to share her story and to have somebody listen. Kelly's mental ill health is perhaps key to understanding how people were able to consistently abuse a woman being supported by different professionals. However, it would not be difficult to assume the abuse has exacerbated, if not created, her mental illness. Her vulnerability is clear throughout her narrative and the manner of acceptance she has, but through the desire she demonstrates to share her experiences she is clearly a woman fighting to be in control and to be heard. Questions therefore arise about the ability of services to prevent women falling victim to abusers once the initial damage of abuse has been initiated.

Bethany specifically blamed her experience of abuse for her homelessness and the other difficulties in her life. Sexually abused and groomed at the age of 13 for two years she tells me; *'he would offer alcohol and cigarettes, I thought it was cool, my Mum would never let me'.* For a long time Bethany thought that she was in a relationship with her abuser *'I just called him my boyfriend'* but as she grew older she realised the relationship wasn't 'right'. There was also the realisation that there were other 'girlfriends' too, one of which a close family friend and also under the legal age of consent.

The biggest factor in vulnerability for Bethany was her age. The ability of a predator, through his own friendships, to manipulate and groom a teenage girl. Grooming and sexual exploitation have both become more commonplace phrases, understood by most adults and staff working with young people, in the last five years due to the large scale sexual exploitation seen in cities such as Rotherham and Telford. However at the time of Bethany's abuse she was unaware of both terms and said that nobody ever spoke to her about them until she was old enough to have understood that their relationship was wrong.

In contrast homelessness seemed to be the creator of the abuse for Leah. Being homeless from a young age due to relationship breakdowns within her family Leah relied on extended family, friends and herself to ensure she did not sleep on the streets. It was whilst living in supported accommodation she was sexually assaulted by a 'friend' she made there. Leah did not give any explanation herself for the friendship she made and she feels that she never had any reason to believe that he would hurt her. However when she talks about him, his lifestyle and his friendship group it is clear that he could be described as 'unsavoury' and perhaps somebody you might be weary of. There are stories scattered throughout the literature of female homelessness of women creating friendships with people whose motives could be questioned. The relationship here can be explained like the other women's; by a consideration of their need and desperation for companionship and their ability – in Leah's case due to her childhood relationships – to build strong and sustainable relationships, and to recognise what is a healthy relationship.

In Leah's narrative it is clear that she feels let down by her familial relationships and that she feels unsupported by them, when talking about her mother she explains *'she pretends to be supportive but she isn't really, she's never there, she just likes to tell people she is'.* The need

Leah has to be loved is apparent and her willingness to build a relationship with me is just one example of this. Leah requires affirmation throughout her narrative questioning whether I have understood her words and whether I can understand her point of view. At times she seemingly wants to 'play down' her association with services and demonstrates an interest in me in an attempt to befriend me and so that I don't consider her *'like the rest of them in here'.* This 'need' makes her vulnerable to relationships that may manipulate, use and ultimately hurt her and prevents her from questioning the words of others when they are telling her what she wants to hear. Furthermore it is easy to wonder whether she has been given the guidance throughout her childhood to make choices and ask questions in relationships and whether this lack of direction has affected her confidence in doing so.

Of course there is the most overwhelming aspect of Leah's vulnerability also – her association with the homelessness project and the fact she was living in supported accommodation. The environment she was in meant that she was able to meet others who were also vulnerable and whom had evidently suffered some damaging experiences. They are also trying to find their way at a young age through a murky world they know little about. Perhaps then it is not their ability to make decisions and choices full stop, but just right now, when so much more is going on that adds to their vulnerability in the moment? Would they/Leah be so vulnerable elsewhere? Leah is hopeful with her new start that she is not.

5.3.1.1 The Overall Impact

A summary of the many ways the women have been effected by abuse is given here so the reader can be certain of the significance of their experiences for women. Firstly, the impact on the women was clear not only from their words but also from the frequency that they referred to the incidents and the amount of time they spent sharing their stories. The interviews with the women were purposefully unstructured so that the women could focus on the areas that **they** felt were important in their experiences of homelessness services. All of them focused on their experience of homelessness overall and for most abuse was the biggest part of this experience. Intertwined as they often were with their relationships with others, children, substances and mental health, stories of violence and sexual abuse were those most vividly presented signifying the importance of these experiences on their overall story and journey of homelessness.

Secondly, all of the women were still being effected by the incidents they had encountered, either through their current housing situation, living in fear, leaving the area in which they grew up or their relationship with their children. The influence on housing was such that six out of the eight women I spoke to – Debbie, Lucy, Christine, Kelly, Hannah and Bethany – had all left their homes and for some their originating town or city to get away from their abusers. The abuse itself at some point had made them homeless. Jackie was about to become homeless due to the abuse she had suffered and Bethany and Leah had felt pressured to remain in unhappy accommodation due to their history of abuse.

Feasibly the most heart breaking impact of the abuse is on the women's relationship with their children. As previously stated Christine is no longer the main carer for her daughter as she was concerned for her daughter's safety had she stayed with her:

'She's been with me all the time…she's just been back home with my mum now for four year [since the age of 13], cause a lot's been going on. My daughters signed over to my Mother [me: and that's a safety thing isn't it?] for her yeah. As long as she's looked after that's the main thing'

Christine did not talk much about this decision in the narratives, however she did talk more to me before the recordings began, her tone was defensive and she made it clear that she felt she had no choice. Christine also makes it clear that her mum is a worthy option who will care for her daughter and keep her safe and that her daughter is happy there. This conversation allows me to think that Christine is concerned about being judged for her decision to *'sign over'* her daughter, and also that it is not a decision she is happy to have made. The impossible position she was placed in due to the violence she experienced meant she was forced to make a decision that has forever changed her relationship with her daughter and her role as a mother.

Hannah also no longer cares for her children because of the existence of abuse in her life. Hannah had both her children removed from her care due to concerns about her being able to keep them safe. Her youngest child was removed as they were concerned about violence occurring in her relationship – from her to him – when alcohol was involved and the frequency with which this occurred, this is in conjunction with her mental health. Although the physical abuse described here came from Hannah, her overall life experiences and the fact that she witnessed so much physical abuse as a child and throughout her lifetime establishes that

abuse she has suffered has influenced her behaviour and ultimately meant that another mother is without her children.

One explanation of this recurring abuse is the evidence of a history of reliance on men which was common among the women. Lucy for example spoke of times when she was evicted from properties and therefore returned to a violent relationship with her children in tow so that she could provide them with somewhere to live. Kelly talks about how she sees herself as a target to abusers*, 'like they know'.* Debbie talks about going into care to get away from her abusive father and then finding herself in an abusive relationship which she stayed in for 10 years because she did not feel able to leave – a familiar rhetoric for domestic abuse victims.

Many explanations are available in literature for why women may feel dependant on men, most have their roots in a feeling of desperation at that point in time. Their feeling of vulnerability to all men if they are homeless and rough sleeping may push them to seek the 'protection' of one man for example. The feeling that they may need a man to complete a home, and could be judged quite harshly if they don't have one is another (Hooper, 1996).

It is argued that economically women are also forced to be more reliant on a male partner as they are given less opportunity to earn and achieve as much financially than men (Maye-Banbury, 2011). This disadvantage means that women suffering from domestic abuse are more likely to stay with or start a relationship with an abusive partner as they cannot afford to be on their own, or see few other options for supporting themselves and their family (May 1997, Watson and Austerberry 1986).

This research could both support these theories and also highlight another: a lack of self-efficacy that meant the women saw no other option but to stay or return. The narratives demonstrate this feeling may have been reinforced by some of the professionals they were in contact with regarding the abuse they suffered, emphasising the role of these workers in ending abuse and avoiding homelessness. Christine and Kelly both sought support from the police, viewed by them at the time as an authority created to protect them, when they experienced abuse.

Christine states that *'I went to the police and they advised me to get out of [previous town lived in] go somewhere where I was safe'.* However she explains that she was not offered any practical help by them to move out of the city or to find somewhere new. It was left to her to contact services outside of the town she was in, and she naturally looked toward a city she had some previous connection with.

Kelly was offered more support in terms of getting some justice for the crimes committed against her, *'police were involved and he got a nine month prison sentence yes'* although she felt the sentence was too short and she also felt that she was offered little in the way of other types of support such as practical or emotional. Neither Christine nor Kelly were signposted to other specific services, nor physically put in contact with any, this they were expected to do for themselves. The police then relied on the ability and confidence of these women to seek out these services and make contact with them. They relied on them having the capacity to understand and finances and facilities to make this step. They relied on their willingness to contact somebody from a town or city they do not know, somebody they have never met or spoken to and share a personal and significant story that maybe few others know about. They relied then on that service being able to help at that time. They relied on too many unknowns and it may have been understandable if at this time neither of the women took this step and one or both of them had returned to their abusive situation, or found themselves in another.

Finally, and perhaps most concerning, all of the women seemed resigned and at times accepting of their experiences and alternative relationships are not discussed or referred to at all. None of the women stated they wanted a relationship without violence or knew that relationships could be different for example. In fact only two of the women had accessed services specifically for women who have been the victim of abuse and sought support and help for their abuse specifically. The pressure of managing these experiences alone was obviously great for the women and it is maybe no surprise that the next most commonly discussed area in the women's narratives was their mental health.

5.3.2 What comes first?

'Mental ill health has always been closely correlated with homelessness being both a cause and consequence of the loss of accommodation for far too many'

(Rees, 2009: iii).

As this quote illustrates mental ill health and homelessness are commonly associated and research suggests that for women rates of mental ill health are even higher than they are for men (Rees, 2009). A study investigating women rough sleepers in the UK, Hungary and Spain found that one of the overarching issues affecting all of the women was mental ill health (Moss and Singh, 2012).

The findings here supports this idea, with all of the women spoken to talking about their episodes of mental illness, in particular depression and anxiety. These periods of *'feeling low'* could be attributed to a time before the women were roofless – perhaps a more accurate word than homeless for the women who often did not identify themselves as homeless when living with friends and family. They were more likely to be highlighted during times of emotional stress materialising from the break down and upset of personal relationships such as those with family or partners.

Bethany recalls 'feeling low' from a young age and described herself as feeling depressed *'for as long as I can remember'* more recently though since the police had been involved in her case she states that this level of depression has increased and she has sought support in terms of prescribed medication and with a mental health project in the city. Bethany left college because she was unable to focus on her work and admits that her choices since then, particularly with regards to her accommodation have been poor which she blames on the fact that her *'head is all over the place'.*

For Bethany the abuse she suffered and the subsequent isolation from her family meant that she could not maintain her mental health and struggled to make big decisions important for her future. It also impacted on her sense of self-worth, Bethany often used phrases such as *'it doesn't matter anyway'* and '*not that anyone cares'* when talking about her time sofa surfing, the likelihood of her eviction and even the prospect of her being street homeless. Bethany's lack of self-worth could well be the reason that she was facing homelessness again and permitted herself and her flat to be used by others who showed her little care.

Leah is also a young woman receiving treatment for her mental health. She has recently stopped taking the anti-depressants she was prescribed as she was told by a friend that they

would make her unwell and unable to focus. She was also concerned that she would end up having to take them for the rest of her life. Since she had stopped taking them Leah described her mental state as *'well I did try the other week…you know try to end it'*. Leah would not consider returning to the doctors to receive more treatment as she does not trust them. Leah says she didn't need the medication until she started living at the young people's hostel – but before the assault she suffered – because she just felt *'a bit alone'.*

Leah associates her mental health deteriorating with being on her own rather than being homeless. She did not consider herself homeless in the young people's accommodation as she was not rough sleeping. She shared some concerns that moving into her own flat would mean being on her own for periods of time and how this might make her feel. The idea that the accommodation that should be resolving Leah's 'problems' could be what is exacerbating them demonstrates the significance of mental health in maintaining a sustainable home and breaking the cycle of recurring homelessness.

Kelly spoke at length about her mental ill health and the frequent episodes of self-harm she had experienced:

'I were self-harming and everything, cutting and taking overdoses but when I say taking overdoses I mean taking overdoses not just so many tablets and telling people I were gonna do it before there's none of that, there's no warning I just do it and boomph I'm gone'

Her mental health history included stays within psychiatric hospitals and sometimes they were lengthy. Rather than her homelessness causing her mental health Kelly is clear that her mental health is what is impacting on her life and significantly her housing situation. She reports that it affects her relationships and tells how she argued with her son before and threw him out because of her mental health '*I threw a cup of coffee at him'.* The impact of the horrific abuse she has suffered is clearly influencing her mental health and she states *'I were always depressed'.* Talking about her self-harm she describes why she does it quite clearly and her self-awareness at times was poignant.

'When I cut with the razor blade I don't just superficial cut I sink the razor blade straight into my arm and carry on cutting that is the kind of mentality I have. When I start doing it its relief'

Kelly is receiving treatment for her mental health and sees her doctor regularly for medication *'the tablets that I'm on are keeping me on an even keel'.* Despite the fact that it appears her mental health is the cause of her homelessness, Kelly talks openly about the fact that her housing situation is key to her sustaining more positive mental health and the hope she has for the new start she feels the homeless service she is using will offer her. For Kelly it is the security that a tenancy affords her, particularly in a local authority home, which will help her to be able to focus on looking forward.

Christine states within the interview '*I'm sick of being depressed'.* Unlike Kelly she feels that her current homelessness is the cause of the depression and much like Kelly she feels that secure accommodation will help her to overcome her current mental ill health and move on feeling more positive.

Lucy and Hannah both spoke to me about their clinical diagnosis of bipolar and personality disorder respectively and felt that some of the mental health traits being experienced by Hannah were hereditary. They told stories of arguments with each other, partners, police and support staff that they attributed to their mental ill health and both felt support services at times had lacked understanding for their situation.

There seemed to be a widespread willingness from all the women to discuss their mental health during the interviews, and there was no visible embarrassment or denial that their mental health was poor. How 'ill' they were and what action they should take seemed incongruent to the information they gave. In general there appeared to be an acceptance of poor mental health, an expectation almost, amongst the women which had led to a lack of real understanding of treatments or a desire to find them.

Most of the women were accessing provision for their mental health from the GP, although for many this was a recent support addition to their lives, having accessed this service after stabilising their accommodation in hostels or more long term placements. For all the women lengthy time periods could be identified where they had not received support and conceivably could have used it.

5.3.2.1 The overall impact

Mental ill health was discussed by all of the women in this study and could be linked to both being the cause and as an effect of their homelessness. As previously stated the 'interviews' allowed the women to discuss what was important to them on their journey, mental ill health weaved its way into every story told, most frequently in their discussion of relationships and support needs. For some they had been managing their mental health for many years and for others it was more recently but significantly for **ALL** the women involved in this study mental ill health was a current support need.

The impact of mental ill health on the homeless journeys of the women spoken to could be argued. Long term mental health conditions were pinpointed by Kelly as being partly to blame and hindering her ability to maintain a home. Hannah had spent time living in supported accommodation for those with mental ill health and she believed that this had been one of her most successful housing placements. She also associated her mental ill health with losing her children and was keen to be supported for it.

For other participants the direct correlation was not recognised or addressed. Whether homelessness 'caused' their mental health or exacerbated an existing condition or whether their mental health created conditions that led to homelessness is often unclear to the women so intertwined are the two. What can be seen in the timelines, and often was recognised in these participants is that the 'periods' of mental ill health and homelessness often go hand in hand and therefore a relationship cannot be denied.

Furthermore, its impact is undoubtedly far reaching. Whatever its cause mental ill health almost certainly represents one of the reasons for the repeated episodes of homelessness amongst the women. Research shows that mental ill health represents an additional barrier for somebody in improving their situation – housing, relationships and general health; making it even more difficult for the women I spoke to feel capable of creating sustainable changes (Fitzpatrick, Bramley and Johnsen, 2012). Treatments being received by the women varied as you would expect with those having received definitive diagnosis receiving clinical treatment and being in frequent contact with their GP and mental health professionals. However, for those identifying as having depression and/or anxiety this use of medical services was not always apparent with women preferring to manage the condition themselves, perhaps

because as previously stated there seemed to be a high level acceptance of mental ill health in the narratives.

Also significant is the fact that none of the women had been identified as having a 'priority need' under national housing legislation by the local authority due to or despite their mental ill health, therefore suggesting that although it is so clearly a factor for these women it is not recognised as effecting women so severely it makes them 'more' vulnerable. The women themselves also did not talk about their mental health management and/or treatment as being included in their homeless support. In fact they talked about individual agencies offering them different types of support. The only exception to this was Hannah who, as already mentioned, identified her time within mental health supported accommodation placement as one of her most successful. Surely then there is an argument for women being supported primarily for their mental ill health and secondary to that with their accommodation, instead of the other way around?

The findings here suggest that no matter what level of mental ill health its treatment and direction for managing it needs to be at the forefront when offering support to single homeless women. Their seems to be overwhelming evidence that to succeed in reintegration – which is the main aim of the services included here – women need to be able to maintain good mental health or their housing and stability will suffer.

5.3.3 – That old friend to homelessness…

The general consensus amongst researchers is that substance misuse and homelessness are connected (Homeless Link (a), 2017). In support of other literature substance misuse was a common theme for the women included in this study. The most commonly used substance here was alcohol. Five of the women used alcohol currently on a daily basis. Another of the women had done so previously. Two of these women were also currently using drugs and three more disclosed that they had been drug dependant in the past, the drugs being referred to were crack cocaine and heroin or *'harder drugs'.* What could be termed softer drugs such as cannabis were not referred to by the women but this does not mean that they were not used.

Alcohol is largely reported in research regarding homeless men and there are overall less reported differences between women and men in relation to drug use in the homeless

population. A study looking at multiple exclusion homelessness shows that people who are excluded due to homelessness are also generally further excluded by other 'domains of social exclusion'; one of which is substance misuse (Fitzpatrick, Bramley, Johnsen, 2012). The same study showed that alcohol was the most reported substance to be used but that other hard drug use was also highly reported.

In the narratives women disclosed their substance misuse with regret and with a desire to quit or with pride if they had managed to get support or abstain. Debbie described her reasons for using heroin; *'I smoke [heroin] just to feel normal'*. This suggests that life without heroin for Debbie is actually more abnormal than with it and that her body is physically dependant on the substance. The idea that the use of such a hard drug could be normal is testament to the amount of time she has been using heroin and the level of addiction that she has. She expresses regret about her substance addiction and told me with feeling '*I've had enough'.* Her addiction seemed to be both a cause and result of the other issues in her life at the time of the interview and in the life history she shared. It had led to her being imprisoned, being the fundamental reason that she committed crime, and to her being homeless. Debbie was evicted from her last property due to one of her 'associates' assaulting her landlord, ultimately as she allowed him onto the premises she was deemed responsible.

More recently Debbie's addictions had extended to include alcohol. She was particularly disappointed with herself for drinking – *'I drink now, I didn't use to drink'.* Although she never states why being addicted to alcohol seems to upset her more than her addiction to heroin, it is clear that alcohol was the root cause of her problems within the family home and what led to her being in care, and ultimately to a lifetime of being unsettled. Her addiction can also be traced back to this period of her life when she first started taking drugs as a runaway teenager.

Debbie's drug use has led to her health being severely affected, she particularly struggles with her lungs and heart, having previously suffered tuberculosis and pneumonia, both ultimately caused by smoking heroin. Her poor health makes her vulnerable to the risks of street homelessness and have led to her wanting to be more focused on change in her future. Having said this her substance misuse issues were noticeable during the data collection process and caused the interview process with Debbie to be quite tricky, generating some ethical concerns for me as a researcher discussed further in 'impact of substance misuse'.

Jackie also used heroin and alcohol during her period of addiction. At the time of interview Jackie described herself as an ex-user and she told me with pride that she had *'been clear of heroin for three years'.* She had stopped using heroin with the help of community drug teams (CDT's), although she tells me that this was not an immediate process and despite being 'clean' for the last three years she had been working with drug services '*since [her son] was born, since I was 22'* . In fact she had '*been under different CDT's for many years'* having had '*a drug and alcohol problem since I were about thirteen'.*

Similar to Debbie Jackie disclosed that she suffers with poor physical health directly linked to her addictions; *'I've got pancreatitis, I used to be quite a heavy drinker and I imagine that's what's caused it'.* These health concerns on their own didn't seem to be the catalyst for change, instead a lengthy and sustained period of 'trying' to get clean, ending with some success seemed to be a truer story.

Like Jackie Christine described herself as abstinent for three years at the time of the interview, she had used the support of local drug teams and still saw them regularly. When I asked her why after so much time she continued to see them she informed me:

'For medication love, to get my tablets and that and to get my medicine. I really need the support for that and I'm getting it, they're giving me them'

This suggests that although Christine may no longer be taking illegal drugs, substance misuse and addiction are still a factor in her life and will be relevant in determining Christine's future; her ability to work and live independently. Christine however did not feel that her previous addictions and her housing situation were linked, and whilst discussing her support for drug use she described this very separately to the support being accessed for housing. The support for substance misuse was discussed in terms of how they were helping her maintain her abstinence, when questioned as to whether the same service helped her when she found herself homeless she reacted with confusion and informed that *'no, they help me with my drugs'.* The link however for most of the women in this study is very apparent; whether their substance misuse led directly to homelessness through eviction or it has led to times of imprisonment, for all of the women who spoke of substance misuse the consequences were huge.

5.3.3.1 – Criminal connections…

Previous research has highlighted the increased likelihood of men being involved in criminal activity (Anderson et al, 1993, Jones, 1999). Explorations of the types of criminal activities homeless people involve themselves in when using substances discusses the difference between men and women, exposing that whereas men are more likely to be involved in theft related activities women are more likely to be involved in sex work (Pilcher 1999 and Lowthian 2001). None of the women spoken to in this research admitted to sex working and only one of the women was using a service known for supporting women involved in sex work but always referred to this involvement being for drug use, housing and financial support.

Criminal activity was a common denominator with the women in this study who admitted to using substances. As stated above Debbie's addiction had led to her being imprisoned and in fact she informed me that she had *'been in prison a lot'*. All of her crimes were drug related and focused around the crimes of theft. The theft raised money for Debbie to buy the drugs and alcohol her body needed. Her time being imprisoned also meant that she was away from her son and family and ensured that her ability to 'settle down' was made more difficult.

Lucy has also experienced several spells of imprisonment, the majority due to crimes of theft, her most recent for theft and assault after she physically attacked the security guard who caught her shoplifting. Drug and alcohol use was a repeated pattern in Lucy's life, although less a constant addiction than it seems it may have been for some of the other women spoken to, Lucy had periods of time where she uses drugs consistently and drank heavily. These have then been followed by periods of abstinence or a swap in 'drug of choice' before the pattern is repeated again. Criminal behaviour and her time in prison seem to go hand in hand with the consistent phases and led to her on more than occasion losing her accommodation and her home. Whilst in prison she could not claim the housing benefit she needed to maintain a property and therefore the landlord, in her case the local authority, took back possession of the property. Lucy explains that the last property in which this happened was her favourite of all the places she had lived and she had spent a lot of time, money and effort to make it nice and when the council emptied the property all of her belongings they were '*thrown on the skip'*. This left her feeling angry and upset and meant that she is once again starting from scratch.

Hannah not only faced long periods of time in her childhood being separated from her mother due to her periods of imprisonment, ultimately created from substance misuse; she herself experienced estrangement from her children because of substances and her criminal behaviour. Not to ignore the significance here of intergenerational substance misuse, homelessness and parenting as it is clear from the findings of this study that it must ultimately be questioned but as it presents itself as such a large issue it will be further discussed in Chapter 6.

Hannah describes her substance misuse as binges. She told me that she could have long periods of time where she did not drink alcohol or take drugs at all but when she drinks *'she drinks!'* During these binges she also tends to use substances, again there seems to be no pattern as to what these substances may include, they are just whatever may be around her at the time and has included *'coke, pills, whatever'.* Cannabis was the only substance that she talked about using regularly throughout her life, and she did not seem to consider this a danger to her – in terms of physical health or behaviour. Considering Hannah's mental health diagnosis for personality disorder and possible bipolar and the links between these and cannabis use, it seems likely that it could be impacting her but maybe the effects have not yet been highlighted.

Hannah does however link her drink and drug binges to her criminal behaviour as it changed her personality dramatically and she told me *'I don't always react well'.* These bad 'reactions' have effected many of her relationships and led to her losing supported accommodation previously. They have also included criminal damage (to the property she was drinking in), assault towards members of the public she does not know and physical violence towards her partner. Hannah has spent time in prison and been *'in trouble with the police'* since the age of 14 and these previous convictions and further reports, particularly of violence towards her partner have contributed to her children being removed from her care by the local authorities.

In contrast Bethany and Leah shared their story of being the victims of crime – discussed in their stories of abuse – both of which took place whilst under the influence of alcohol, in Bethany's case given to her by her perpetrator. The use of substances therefore can be linked not only to the women's own criminality but to their increased vulnerability to other criminal behaviour towards them.

The severe consequences of the criminal behaviour displayed in the narratives was clear throughout these interviews; loss of home by going to prison and all personal belongings (Lucy) and loss of children (Hannah) – although indirect it added to concerns for social services. In terms of becoming a victim of crime this seemed to add to the overall feeling of vulnerability and worthlessness of the women (Leah). The link between criminal behaviour (either their own or against them) and substance misuse was abundantly clear in this study and therefore substance misuse must be held to account for the increased vulnerability of women who use substances for homelessness.

5.3.3.2 The overall impact

As referred to above the impact of substance misuse on the women was broad, integrating into all major and important areas of their lives; homes, families and health were all effected. These will be summarised here, but firstly another partly unexpected impact will be discussed; the impact their substance misuse had on the data collection process. The frequency of alcohol and drug use varied between the women and was problematic in the interview process creating ethical dilemmas for me as a researcher.

5.3.3.2.1 Impact on research

The impact could most clearly be seen in the interviews arranged with Debbie. At the time of the interviews Debbie used alcohol and drugs daily. Our second interview therefore had to be rearranged before I could be sure that she could fully consent to participating. The first time I arrived for our second interview Debbie was not there, she had forgotten about our meeting whilst under the influence. The second time, it was clear that Debbie was under the influence and therefore I felt ethically to accept information from Debbie would have been wrong. Debbie was happy to participate but previous experience working with substance users taught me that Debbie may well over-share as well as confuse experiences, dates and situations, she could also not want to talk about certain circumstances and this could leave her feeling defensive or stressed if they arose. I wanted Debbie to have as much control over her information as possible and we therefore arranged for her interview to take place first thing in the morning to ensure that I could speak with her at her most coherent. To be clear, this did not mean that Debbie had not had a drink at all, in her words she would need a *'straightener'*

to ensure that she could concentrate before any interview took place. Debbie would describe herself at this point of the day as *'completely sober'.*

For the other participants, the same timing of the interviews was arranged where possible to try and prevent this situation occurring, however missed appointments were frequent and many of the interviews were arranged several times before they took place. This is an example of the grip substances had on these women even when they are seeking support to become more settled. It can also raise questions about the other women living in and using these services who were not participating in this study. It could be argued that the women who volunteered did so because they felt they were in a period of their lives where they could offer something back, and also focus on something other than their situation, therefore perhaps they felt they were in a more settled place.

The women who did not may just not have wanted to talk to a stranger about their histories, or perhaps were in a period of existence that was too chaotic to be able to commit to something else. If the latter is true for them, how can they meet the requirements of support services – to attend appointments, to answer phone calls and to be available and 'committed' to change? How can these services meet the needs of women who can be difficult to reach, find and ultimately offer their services to?

5.3.3.2.2 The impact on women

In addition to the link between criminality and substance misuse, the overall bearing of the women's substance misuse behaviour on their housing situation was clear throughout these interviews.

Firstly, there was a demonstrable link between substance misuse and a difficulty in maintaining accommodation once it had been found. As previously revealed Lucy discussed in her narrative the loss of two properties because she was sent to prison and therefore was unable to claim housing benefit for the required period of time. Lucy had however lost properties through substances in other ways, for example her eviction from the domestic abuse refuge due to complaints – *'they said it was sex, drugs and rock and roll'.* Although Lucy denies this behaviour was apparent on the scale they insisted on, there was evidently some alcohol and drug use occurring which was breach of the accommodation's rules as well as

impacting her attitude toward the service. A later property that she had sought through a private landlord she describes as being *'took over by drug dealers'.* At this time they were associates of Lucy's and she was allowing them to stay there whilst she was drinking and using their substances. However Lucy wanted to stop this behaviour and did not feel safe asking them to leave so instead she sought new accommodation for her and her children. A new property was found for Lucy through a different charity but Lucy later on also had to leave this property due to problems with her neighbours, made worse by their and her own drug and alcohol use. These frequent moves have impacted on Lucy's ability to feel settled and to truly understand how to sustain a property and consider issues such as her own and others safety, the neighbour's needs and the desires of the landlord. It also demonstrates the willingness of services to support women such as Lucy but that even with the support that was offered in some of these properties of financial management, acquiring furniture and emotional support, substance misuse can ensure that this is not enough.

Allowing people into accommodation whilst under the influence of substances was also the reason that Debbie lost her last flat. Again it was an 'associate' she knew through her drug use. They were visiting her flat and they were using together. When her landlord came to the flat and found them there he tried to remove them which led to him being assaulted. Ultimately Debbie was deemed responsible and she was asked to leave. This is further evidence of the influence substances have over women and their behaviour. For most people their home and their security would come before the wants and needs of an associate. However when using substances and given the opportunity to make this drug use easier those things were placed second.

Hannah also lost accommodation through her substance misuse, losing her place in supported accommodation for people with mental ill health. Hannah informed me that she was drinking a lot at the time and on *'a binge'* that meant she had not returned to the accommodation for several nights. This in itself was against the rules of the accommodation – as places are limited they want to offer them to those who need it most, if you are not there it could be considered that you do in fact have somewhere else to stay. The accommodation are flexible with this if they are informed of the absence but they were not. On her return to the accommodation Hannah tells me that they *'went on about the fact I hadn't been there'* and she had a letter in her room sent in her absence with a warning from the accommodation about her absence and

outstanding rent arrears from the service charge. Whilst still under the influence Hannah went to speak with the manager which led to a row, Hannah felt she should not have to inform them of her absence and nor should she have to pay for a service charge when she was not there. She admits that she *'kicked off'* and that she was rude to the staff in the accommodation. The accommodation said she was aggressive, they also were aware she was under the influence – against the rules. Hannah was then evicted for this incident as she was already considered to be on a final warning.

A pattern can be heard in Hannah's behaviour whilst under the influence and she is aware that it exists, however, so far has been unable to break it. This is perhaps because whilst growing up this was a similar pattern to what she witnessed and it has been normalised for her. It also seems that these binges occur when things become too hard for Hannah to manage or because she wants to fit in. Her personality disorder could mean that she finds it more difficult to disengage from this behaviour, and this is what Hannah believes. The accommodation she was evicted from were supporting Hannah with her disorder and trying to help her find new ways to cope but she was finding this too slow and also too difficult. The question again arises for services about the best way to support women like Hannah when they disengage and how are they to support Hannah whilst ensuring their rules are adhered to and all service users are treated the same?

Secondly, the narratives also exposed that the use of substances made it harder for the women to find housing initially. Previous evictions, and in some cases debts to landlords, meant that new landlords were hesitant and demonstrated concerns. It also meant that some supported accommodation services were not keen to have the women live with them and may explain why so few had made use of domestic abuse refuges known to be particularly careful about a woman's history of violence, criminal behaviour and substance misuse before they allow them to move in. This is because of the level of vulnerability of the women they serve and protect. However this does mean that women who have experienced violence as well as exhibited it, or those women who use or have used substances, can fall between the gaps.

The women were often aware of the impact of the use of substances on their lives and also on their ability to maintain relationships with family members; including their children. The link between their children not living with them and substance misuse was clear to the women and

identified as one of the biggest reasons they would like to quit in the words of Lucy – '*It's not fair on the children'.* Although abstinent at the time of the interview Jackie admitted the damage previous substance misuse had had on her situation and her relationship with her son. The stress of her current situation and of facing eviction again also concerned her and made her worried that a return to substances may occur, particularly alcohol. It could be suggested that a 'vicious circle' is created by the stress generated by the difficulty imposed on women to find new accommodation. This stress leads to further use of substances, and therefore further difficulties in finding accommodation (Hutson and Liddiard, 1994). This adds to the idea of a revolving door of homelessness and the desperation of these women which I have previously argued may be the reason for so many women remaining in a cycle of abuse. This revolving door is further highlighted in the next section demonstrating the levels of repeated homelessness discussed by women.

5.3.4 – Here we go again

Kelly – 'Here I go again, 52 years old and homeless'

The major themes discussed above all support the available literature, but what I also saw from these interviews is a compelling picture of missed opportunities. All bar one of these women had been homeless before. Some in childhood. Could this explain why these women seemed to struggle so much to overcome their experiences and create sustainable change? If greater support had been offered at an earlier stage would this have made a difference?

The existing literature has shown that recurrent homelessness is primarily a concern for those members of the homeless population that have multiple and complex needs. This study, supports this argument. History of abuse, use of substances and a chaotic childhood were all factors for the seven women experiencing repeated homelessness. However the literature also supports the idea that multiple episodes of homelessness is something more commonly experienced by men and that generally it is experienced by a small number of the homeless population (Pleace, Bretherton, Mayock in Bretherton and Mayock 2016). This study would argue that this is not the case, rather that, as in the case of the women participants, people reporting themselves as homeless now may only just be recognising a situation they have in fact experienced previously and that the low numbers of the homeless population reporting repeated homelessness is more about how they identify homelessness.

Bretherton et al (2016), argue that women's experiences of long term homelessness is not recognised in contemporary literature and that consequentially 'knowledge and understanding of women's particular experience of long-term homelessness is weak' which proposes a problem for policy making and services hoping to support this population (p210).

Women have historically been seen to exit homelessness more frequently than men because they are likely at some point to become pregnant, and as mothers legally have more rights and a greater access to accommodation. Although this pattern can be seen in the lives of Debbie, Lucy, Jackie and Hannah, all of whom speak of a time of stable accommodation when they had their children, on greater analysis this study demonstrates support for other studies that show homelessness is likely to reoccur when women 'become single' again (Jones 1999; Mayock et al. 2015). This is because for these women this period of stable accommodation did not prevent them from returning to homelessness once their children are grown, or in some cases removed.

Reading about the women at the beginning of this chapter the experiences of recurrent homelessness becomes clear. Debbie is introduced as the 'woman who has been homeless on and off for years', this journey of homeless starts at the age of 13 when she used to run away from her children's home and stay with friends 'sofa surfing'. I should make it clear here that this is a term used as a researcher, Debbie never used this terminology to describe her experiences, instead she talked of *'staying with friends'.* From the age of 17 Debbie acquired many different properties and accommodation all of which ended as a result of a chaotic lifestyle when a return to the familiar practice of sofa surfing ensued. Despite this repeated cycle stemming thirty years or more, her current service use is the first time that Debbie has approached a homeless charity that offers accommodation and even whilst using it has had breaks away when she has been sofa surfing at different friends. The pattern then seems clear, however Debbie does not describe herself as homeless when with friends making a true interpretation of her 'homeless journey' difficult and supporting her out of homelessness more complicated. How do you undo so many years of learnt survival techniques? How do you undo the belief system that has been built?

Focusing on women's ability to identify as homeless and teach them new patterns and beliefs could perhaps seem like one answer for addressing female homelessness, however, as demonstrated by Lucy, this will not work for all. Lucy has been homeless for much of her adult life. Her childhood though is more of a mystery. Lucy had so much information to impart about the services she had used we were never able to talk about her history in detail. Lucy unlike Debbie has always identified herself as homeless when she has not had her own home and has made use of the services available to her, however her experience is not the 'norm'.

Jackie has been homeless for five years, sofa surfing with friends, her partner's family and living in a tent (effectively sleeping rough) before her partner, rather than her, sought help and support for his housing which prompted her to follow suit. Perhaps her drug use or dependency on this relationship – or both – may explain her reasons why, but this is typical of the women spoken to; only seeking the support of services when faced with no other option. Similar to Debbie, Jackie does not discuss her period of time sofa surfing with concern or refer to herself at this time as homeless, nor does she seek the professional support of any of the services who may have helped her.

Kelly and Hannah were homeless throughout their childhood. Kelly was in a children's home leaving at 15 with no stable accommodation attempting to flee the systematic abuse she was experiencing. Hannah was homeless on numerous occasions, living in a variety of supported accommodations with her mum as they fled her mum's abusive partners and spent long periods of time in care when her Mum was in prison which she consistently ran away from staying with friends and relatives. Again the repeated patterns can be seen throughout their stories of homelessness.

Kelly as an adult lived for a time in supported accommodation offered by a service supporting women experiencing abuse and from there she experienced a period of sustainability when she gained her own council owned accommodation. The recurrence of abuse in her life led to her having to let go of that property and she moved away from her home town to a new city and back into supported accommodation. This willingness to seek support comes from her previous positive experience of supported accommodation and what that led her to, and it is this that Kelly is trying to repeat.

Hannah as an adult has lived in various supported accommodations all for a variety of purposes – fleeing abuse, mental health and now specifically homelessness. She has spent many months and years on and off sofa surfing as well as having her own properties that have been lost for an assortment of reasons – anti-social behaviour, rent arrears, time spent in prison, relationship breakdown. All of the places she has sought help and the reasons for which it has come to an end are identifiable in her mum's story and it is easy to see how and where the experiences have been repeated. For Hannah this existence appears 'normal', in her own words she is *'used to it',* she even at times enjoys it. Maybe for her then a barrier to finding her way out of repeated homelessness is a lack of desire, even a fear of living alone?

Bethany and Leah first became homeless as young teenager's when their relationship's broke down with their families. For Leah this is not her first time homeless, similar to many of the other women, sofa surfing was the first method she used to avoid rough sleeping staying at friends and families houses for about three years before attempting to return home. She moved into supported accommodation only when she became homeless again and a family member insisted she contacted the local authority and found some semblance of security now she was over the age of eighteen. This is her first tenancy and she has some fears about staying alone saying that it is at these times she feels unsafe and thinks about everything she has been through, she also hates having to manage everything alone. This brings into question the validity of this accommodation being long term.

Similar to Leah, Bethany had periods of time before this one sofa surfing and staying with friends and family. When the relationship at home broke down once again she reverted to staying with a friend until this relationship also broke down. When staying with friends she would not identify as homeless, feeling like she did have a roof over her head there, even if she never really felt at home. Only when faced with street homelessness and because of the support of a community project she was in contact with, was the local authority contacted and a declaration of homelessness made. Similar to Leah she hated living alone as it was then that she would think about everything she has experienced and what she is going through, she would also feel very vulnerable; *'your brain just goes mad don't it? You just sit there not able to sleep thinking'.* Bethany now faces eviction and says she does not know what she will do but that she probably has *'a mate [she] can crash with'.* Is this the start of the repetition of a cycle that might also be seen throughout her adulthood?

These previous experiences of homelessness and the complexity of these women's lives could perhaps explain why homelessness for many of the women, is not described in a passionate or desperate way until street homelessness is discussed. Where friends and family are available to stay with and a roof is available this was enough, and for some of the women in this situation they did not identify themselves as homeless. The use of homeless services seemed to come later when they were at risk of rough sleeping (Crisis, 2008).

5.3.5 – Mothers without children

Six out of the eight women spoken to in this study were mothers. This finding is not new. Mayock and Sheridan (2012) found that two thirds of the women they spoke to in their study were mothers. Reeve at al (2006) found in their study of 'single' homeless women 30 percent of their participants were in fact mothers (p16). St Mungo's report on women's homelessness in 2014 showed that 46 percent of their female clients were mothers and 79 percent of them had had their children removed by the local authority.

Their role as a mother and grandmother was an important one for all of the women I spoke to. All spoke with fondness for their children and a keenness to continue and improve the relationship they had with them. It is clear from all their stories that their parenting has been heavily influenced by their lifestyles and housing situations, and that where their children are has heavily influenced their choices and accommodation options. The two are so interlinked it is hard to understand which way is more likely. Perhaps the surprise is that there was little talk of guilt or emotion when their circumstances were talked of and all where possible had maintained relationships, relationships they described in positive terms.
Below are some of their stories and versions of motherhood.

Debbie has an adult son currently in prison and four grandchildren, she spoke about her son with pride in all the interviews – *'he's really funny',* but also with a need for reassurance – *'we're more like mates…that's not a bad thing is it?'*

Debbie states that her son has *'always been with me'*, but during the interview she shares her experiences of being in prison on and off for years, the first time when she was 16, she had her son at 17. She told me that she *'stopped going jail about three years ago'.* She also spoke at length about having to move out of properties she lived in at short notice with no mention of

her son being there. For example a tenancy she had with her ex-partner who was selling drugs and somebody he fell out with shot at the house. She had to move out quickly for her own safety but moved to a property where the '*drugs and trouble'* continued. Debbie has had a long relationship with drugs and alcohol that has led to repeated bouts of homelessness and a chaotic lifestyle. In reality it becomes clear that her son spent much of his time with her Mum, where she returned when she had nowhere else – *'she always let me in'.*

Lucy has one son and two daughters all of whom were now adults. One of her daughters (her youngest) was living in the same homeless accommodation as her at the time of the data collection and also took part in this study. Lucy is comforted by the fact her children can gain access to and receive the support – *'luckily my kids are old enough to come here'.* This is one of the biggest testaments in this study to the fact that homelessness not only runs throughout life cycles but also that homelessness is perhaps accepted as part of life rather than seen as a shocking occurrence.

Social Services were involved with the family since the children were little and they have all spent periods of time in care. Her eldest daughter is not really discussed in her stories of the services she used within the City and she did not move down with her from the North. Her son when she first came here was 15. This caused her some problems in trying to seek refuge in a domestic abuse refuge as he was a grown boy and was mistaken by other residents at times as a partner and his ability to stay at the accommodation (and therefore for all of them to be housed) was questioned. Her son moved out when he was 18 but her daughter stayed with her, apart from some periods of time in foster care where she refused to stay. Her daughter then became pregnant at 17 and moved into a property on her own.

She speaks about her youngest daughters and her own experiences almost simultaneously and at times that makes it hard to separate the two histories and stories. There is some guilt toward her children about what she may have caused them, although not in terms of her accommodation history –

'I've two daughters whose both got different dad's and they've both got is it that bipolar now they're saying it's hereditary, now I've never had it confirmed I'm 51, I tell them I haven't got it, I don't know if I…but my Dad had it'

Priority was given to Lucy when she had her children and this explains why she seems to have used more of the services that are available than some of the other women, without them the children would have been removed from her care. It is only once her daughter moves out that she is classed as a single homeless woman and the types of services she uses change from local authority and domestic abuse support to homeless hostels and charities. Lucy feels strongly that children should be able to stay with their mothers:

'Other mothers…she's got a 16 year old her 39 year old daughter has got him on crack cocaine and heroin…his own sister at 16 has got him on crack and heroin he's going shoplifting, street robbery the poor kid never did that when he was with his mother. His mothers in a double room, surely he could share the same room as his mum, but they won't even allow that, it is wrong'

You could easily assume then that Lucy feels that despite her own unsettled history and the journey she has shared with her children Lucy feels that her children were better off having stayed with her throughout most of it. Lucy never speaks of regret and is proud of the relationship she has with her children, particularly her youngest daughter. This would seem implausible for some people who from the outside would view her lifestyle as not conducive to raising a family and believe that maybe her children would have received a more settled upbringing elsewhere. As Lucy's youngest daughter is now also residing in homeless accommodation the question needs to be asked of services, could be more be done to support mothers as mothers? Could this make a difference to their lifestyle and potentially their children?

Jackie has a son, their relationship had recently broken down after he and his girlfriend had moved into her accommodation and in her words had caused '*chaos'* and she was now facing eviction and the prospect of being homeless again. Due to her use of drugs (heroin and crack cocaine) her son had not always lived with her. She had moved to this city after already previously uprooting to live with her parents, at that time the official guardians of her son – *'I was only there [living with her parents] cause he was there [son], helping my Mum cope with him'*.

Jackie tells the story of how this came to an end when her son stole her father's wallet and this led to her son being kicked out. Social Services were already involved with her son due to her

use of substances and the unsettled life she was leading and at this point he entered foster care and she began sofa surfing. Her son later joined her here in the city showing that despite their history they had a good relationship. The bonds of motherhood have yet again been tested in this relationship and shown to persevere in difficult circumstances, but the impact of her regime can be seen in her sons own lifestyle; when he came to the city he too was homeless and he and his partner moved in with her. This is another example within these narratives of homelessness passing through generations and perhaps being an accepted and learnt behaviour. It also demonstrates that despite alternatives of care being offered by grandparents and foster carers the routine of the mother is key for children.

As previously declared Christine has a daughter, aged 17. She no longer has custody of her daughter due to her experiences of domestic abuse and the lifestyle this has led to with her having to flee and hide. She did not want her daughter to have to live in refuges or be at risk so for her daughters own safety she *'signed over'* her daughter to her mum. Christine has experienced less bouts of homelessness in her history and her daughter seems to have had a settled life thus far. Christine talks little about her feelings of her decision to place her daughter with her mum and describes it in terms of being in the best interest of her daughter and something she had to do to protect her, demonstrating the lengths as a mother she was willing to go to in order to keep her safe. Christine's previous drug use and this decision are never spoken about together so it is unclear if this too had any bearing on the decision made, nor is it clear how much involvement her mum had in raising her daughter before she was *'signed over',* but the language used here would insinuate social services involvement – perhaps solely for the domestic violence – although likely for a combination of factors. Christine again does not mention her daughter in her future plans, but the defensive tone she uses when discussing her daughter seems to suggest that this is because she is protective over her daughter and as a coping strategy she focuses on living her own life. Christine's need to block out her separation from her daughter may mean that she is treated by services as a single woman. This could be dangerous in terms of her ever being able to build that relationship again and in also missing a key vital element of the reason she is homeless in the first place – to give her daughter a home. Christine may have been able to stay with her family but knowing if she stayed her daughter may be in danger was one of the reasons she walked away.

Kelly has several children, a son whom she had aged 16 and three daughters. Her daughters were all fathered by her stepdad who abused her. Her relationship with her son is the one she focuses on, and she beams about her son, she says that she does not have such a good relationship with her daughters, she is not clear why and she does not blame this on their father.

Kelly tells me:

'I worship my son and my son worships me, you ask him about his mummy, he loves his Mum…'I have a connection with my son every day, inbox on Facebook and he phones me or I'll give him a quick call…What he's done for me when I've cut and self-harmed, he's been the one there, when I've overdosed tried killing myself, obviously with tablets, I've woke up my sons been at end of that bed, how he knew I don't know…what that kid went through'

Kelly informs me that their relationship has been built and maintained despite the fact that her son was not raised solely by her. When she fell pregnant with him she was given a council flat and they lived there together for some time. However, as highlighted earlier the sexual abuse she suffered was continuing at this point and did not end until she was 24, she does not talk about the effect this had on her parenting. At the age of 24 she enters a psychiatric hospital for a long term stay and it is clear that her son is not living with her. Social Services are involved with both her and her son and he never returned as a child to live with her after her period in hospital. She has however always had contact with her son. She talks freely about her experiences of self-harm and suicide attempts (see mental health) and his presence in helping her through them, and it is clear for Kelly that this relationship for her has been a positive one that has helped her through periods of great stress and trauma. She attributes him with her not being successful in her attempted suicides and is proud of the times she has been able to support him; as an adult they lived together; *'he lived at my flat…with me, he came over to look after me so he stayed with me for a bit 'cause he used to stay with his sister…He had obviously had problems there and they fell out'.* A major factor she discusses in her future is his impending wedding and how excited she is and how happy she is for him, it seems to give her something to look forward to.

Kelly is considered a single woman as she no longer has any dependants, but the significance of ignoring her role as a mother is undeniable. Kelly's son has been and still is her reason to continue forward, surely then factoring this relationship into her future is key to Kelly exiting

homelessness? How can a service focused on 'single' people ensure they consider this? Can they offer successful support if they do not?

Hannah has three children all under eight. One of those died when they were a baby. Her other children were adopted by other families. Hannah did not agree with any of the decisions made about her children. The decisions were made because of domestic violence that was apparent in her relationship – from her to her partner – and because social services felt that her mental health problems would always mean that she could not care for her children in the correct way. A diagnosis of bipolar which perhaps influenced repeated episodes of homelessness, criminal behaviour, periods of drinking and drug use and a volatile relationship were the main indicators.

Not having her children with her was the most difficult thing for Hannah to cope with and since the decision was made about the second adoption her life has seemingly spiralled out of control. A reason to *'fix'* her life seemed elusive to her and she felt that the services she hoped would help had decided that she could not be helped. At the same time, her main aim in life was to have a home for when her children were old enough to come and find her. Again the need for services to acknowledge these relationships and keep Hannah focused on that ultimate goal would seem key to ensuring Hannah's 'spiral' does not continue. Also support for Hannah to cope with decisions that have been made and the trauma she has suffered. To ignore Hannah as a mother and insist on her being a single homeless woman is to emphasise the fact that she is without her children and add to her distress and could potentially prevent or hinder her recovery. Services therefore working with women need to acknowledge them as mothers and work with them as such. This could help Hannah to start to heal rather than be pushed to try and forget – something she feels she cannot do – and to help give her some hope for her future in which her children may be in.

5.3.5.1 Children's Homelessness

Three of the four women who had adult children talked about their children's current lives. One of these children was in prison, two were currently homeless. As with the women who had displayed previous periods of instability in childhood, either directly through homelessness or through some form of abuse and the connection that could be made to their current homeless condition, a link has to be inferred between their children's instability growing up

and current situation. Despite this this was never discussed by the women. They neither blamed their histories nor showed remorse for their children's predicaments. Instead an air of acceptance and a serendipity could be felt by the women – this was simply the way it was, the way it had always been. Intergenerational homelessness will be discussed in more depth in Chapter 6.

5.3.6 Hope

Despite some of the circumstances that were described by the women and the feelings of hopelessness and acceptance that could be heard in their words and their tones, all apart from the women facing eviction were explicit in their feelings of hope for the future.
Since coming to the service she was in, to this city and moving away from the previous abuse that she suffered Kelly was particularly hopeful for the future; *'I feel like I'm a person, I'm not an animal, I'm not an ornament that somebody can pick up off a shelf and put back when they want, do what they want with it. No chance…I'm happy for me'.* The stability she was experiencing in both her accommodation and her mental health and the absence of abuse from her life were the main reasons for this. She was able to look forward and believed that things, now she was alone and not reliant on another individual, could get better; *'all I want is to live in [this city], have a life and not have his thing about "get out get out" and I'm on the streets again…it's horrible on the streets'.* The homeless service she was residing in also could be attributed to this feeling. Allowing her this space and independence and supporting her to access specific services for her mental health had helped her to gain in confidence. The question of what support she could be offered once she left the service was still one to be addressed.

I asked all of the women what were their plans for the future. Their dreams were simple but most had positive things that they wanted, none of those that answered about their dreams spoke about things they believed they couldn't achieve.

Debbie and Hannah had similar dreams of wanting to become more settled, Debbie wanted to *'sort [her] life out'* and *'try and get my own house, start all over again, but this time I'm not losing it, see my grandkids'.* She felt that she could achieve this and talked about her age (being in her forties) meaning that it was now time. However the recent periods of sofa surfing, and her willingness to give up her place in supported accommodation to check on her

partner, who had also been homeless for a long period, suggest that this transition from unsettled to sustained accommodation may need to be longer than the services offer of support lasts (accommodation is funded for three months initially, any extension must be justified and applied for to the local authority). Likewise Hannah who stated that she wanted to *'get [her] own place again and not lose it'* faced a similar challenge. Her mental health and unsettled history meant that it was hard not to question whether the short amount of time she was currently being offered to reside in her supported accommodation – also three months – would be long enough. Learned behaviours, relationships and substance misuse all need to be challenged. The hope that Debbie has demonstrates a desire to become 'settled', but without the correct support to achieve her dreams it will be difficult for Debbie to attain them. This raises the question of the impact of the funding limits and resources on support services.

Lucy speaks of wanting to *'get a nice little granny flat or something and just lock myself away from the world and live my life',* a sentiment shared by Christine who spoke of wanting to *'try and get a job'* and the fact she wants her *'own privacy'.* Overwhelmingly the women's wish for privacy and independence could be heard and the lifestyle so many of us take for granted – heading home for a night of solitude – is sought. The women have a clear idea of what they want their life to look like. They have their own vision, and for services this gives them some direction with which to work with the women. Starting with a positive and working with the assets the women possess – in the case of Lucy and Christine resilience and determination – is a method often used by services. It still remains though that both women have discussed complex and multi-dimensional reasons for their homelessness and this is a challenge for any service working with them.

For Leah who was currently living in long term accommodation her hopes were different; '*I just need a washing machine and a fridge freezer and I'll be fine'.* The sheer hope behind this statement is clear and she is clearly hopeful that this is her happy ending. I have already previously declared that Leah is unhappy living in this accommodation and this therefore throws up another potential problem for services, even if sustainable accommodation is sought, will it be sustained? It is widely recognised that simply providing accommodation is not the answer to homelessness. For Leah support in her tenancy, which she is receiving, may help her, but still may not be enough to solve the problems that led to her being homeless in the

first place. For Leah supported accommodation could perhaps be a better option at this point in her life, where she could be with someone more regularly to receive support. It could offer her both the emotional and practical support she requires. Or would again the limits to funding and time mean that she would not be able to receive the amount of support she needs?

Although the stories the women shared all differ greatly they all share a sadness and a desperation that has led them to that point in their lives. This part of the interview was positive as it hopefully left them all and myself optimistic for their futures. All of them by using the services felt that they were on their first steps to being able to achieve their hopes and dreams and escape homelessness, and for some addiction, to make a fresh start.

It has proven difficult to explain what hope is, there is a lack of definition within literature, perhaps because it is a feeling, something more abstract that concrete. Bishop and Willis defined hope as 'the ability to perceive positive futures' and relate the word hope to terms such as expectations, attitudes and dreams, describing hope as a social construct with different groups in society having different hopes, dependant on their situation (2014). They also argue the importance of hope in helping to initiate and sustain goals, citing Snyder et al (1997) who highlighted the link between hope and children with physical health needs to making sustained efforts to continue treatment. Moore (2005) determines that having hope is central to making a difference in the lives of those who may feel suicidal and acknowledges that it is hard to define exactly what hope is, but says that it is clear in a person when it is absent and has a 'powerful influence for living' when present. With such an impact hope consequently is imperative to inspiring goals in single homeless women and in encouraging a positive future, it should therefore be central to any support offered by service providers and professionals.

Similar to the authors above I have always understood hope to be the belief that the good thing you want in the future can be achieved. For the female participants the good thing here was overwhelmingly security, and despite the adversity they had experienced, their beliefs that things would and could change for the better were surprisingly (to an objective person who had listened to their narratives repeatedly) strong. The importance of hope, amongst other more practical elements, in overcoming homelessness can be seen within homelessness

literature and in particular the role of services in maintaining and developing that hope has been shown to be imperative (Schneider et al, 2019; May, 2000).

In their research of homeless people in the US, Schneider et al (2019) found that *'in order to help individuals feel a sense of hope, service providers themselves must feel hope.'* This ability for services and professionals working in those services was dependant on them having sufficient support, training and resources. Within the study upon which this thesis is based, we have shown that training for service providers on supporting women was limited, that the resources from which professionals could work were changing, and in many cases reducing, and therefore the impact of this on hope should be considered.

The placement of the women and services, and the resources within it are particularly relevant, and somewhat confusing. The research found that there is a lot of support being offered to homeless people, and in fact a lot of good work happening within the community. The recent improved accessibility and apparent (although as I have shown not actual) increase in the number of beds for single homeless women in the city in which the research is based gives a boost to the hope women are feeling. Being in accommodation services, getting a bed and then a room – or the possibility of a room – also demonstrates a journey towards the 'dream' and instils hope. In contrast the thesis has also shown that there is still a large deficit of help and options for single homeless women and that the reality of recent changes within the city has not resulted in a large increase in housing or beds for single homeless women. Service providers and the professionals working in them are likely to be more aware of this and combined with the lack of training heard from professionals in Chapter 4, finding hope may prove more difficult for them.

However, to continue encouraging hope within their service users is as important as focusing on the practical needs they present. An ability therefore to focus on the positive and a need to be more strategic and flexible to meet policy changes is most definitely required from service providers. What the services could give women is the ability and confidence to make changes, and to actively make the decision to make changes. The fact that the women could speak with such positivity and hope shows that they have a desire for things to be different and to be happy and that despite all their hardships they have not lost this. An overarching desire and hope for security – and to achieve this on their own – speaks of a hope to take back the power

they may have previously lost or feel they have lost through abusive relationships, loss of motherhood in some form or mental ill health and/or addiction. The women are realistic about their need for support and the next section demonstrates their beliefs about what they feel would help them and other women who may find themselves in their position. As you will read there is no feeling that the service they are working with at the moment cannot give them the help they need. In fact there seems to be an overwhelmingly positive view of the services. However, upon further discussion areas of concern did present themselves. Their positive view therefore may be clouded by their hope for what the service can give them and for their futures rather than the reality of what is available at this time.

5.3.7 View of Services

As explained in Chapter 3 the female participants of this study were accessed and recruited in various services throughout the Midlands city in which the research took place. One of the major aims of the research was to find out how these women experienced these services and if they felt that any changes were necessary. My experience from working and in and with these services for many years led me to believe that the women would have largely negative views, as those were what were generally fed back to staff members. Nevertheless the research showed something quite different. An overwhelmingly positive response about the services they used was voiced; although their experiences within them painted a somewhat gloomier picture.

The most startling evidence perhaps however is the lack of services being used by the women. In my previous mapping study 22 services offering support to the homeless population were identified. Eighteen of these could be accessed and used by women. Eleven of these services were actually used by the women, nine of these were services interviewed during the mapping study. Furthermore half of the women had only used three services and 37% had only used two, one of which for all of them was the local authority.

Even more concerning was the timing of when these services were used. As the findings have shown the women's history of homelessness is a long one. Only two of the women however have a long history of accessing services for support, and even those women speak of difficulties they faced before they reported using their first service. This means that in the early stages of homelessness women are not asking for help and are not receiving support.

Reeve et al (2006) report similar findings 'It is of some concern that nearly 40 per cent of the survey sample did not seek formal (i.e. from an agency) help or assistance when they first became homeless or realised they were at risk of homelessness' (p 63).

Also of note was the great separation women placed on services. They never spoke about services working together in multi-disciplinary services, seeing their workers from each as having a specific role dependant on the service. In particular health services – however much designed to work with the homeless and vulnerable community – including GP services and drug teams were not accessed for support around housing '*they weren't really helping us with accommodation'* (Debbie).

To discuss these services I will use the numbers they were referred to previously. The table below shows the type of service and the number they are referred by:

Type of Service	**Number Service referred by**	**For Women**	**For Men**
Homeless Accommodation for single people	2	Yes	Yes
Residential Accommodation for those displaying Mental Ill Health	8	Yes	Yes
Young People's Accommodation Services	11	Yes	Yes
Specific GP Services	3	Yes	Yes
Drug and Alcohol Services for adults	4	Yes	Yes
Day Centres	6	Yes	Yes
Supported accommodation in the community also offering floating support	5	Yes	Yes
Local Authority	1	Yes	Yes
Services for 'sex working women'	7	Yes	No
Domestic abuse multi-service Charity	9	Yes	Yes
Privately run hostel	10	Yes	Yes
Total		**11**	**10**

Table 8. Number service referred by

Also in support of the much larger study conducted by Reeve et al (2006) this study found that the most unhelpful service according to the women was the local authority.

In response to 'did you ever approach the local authority for help?' Debbie describes her experience – 'I *did once or twice but they weren't doing nothing to help me…they just said put you on the housing list and things like that and didn't get nowhere'.* She adds that initially she was told she couldn't be put on the housing list as she was of no fixed abode, although this is not true, at this time she believed it and therefore did not approach them again for some time until somebody else in the homeless community told her she could get their help. When she returned she was told she could go on the housing list but not be registered as homeless as she was not a priority.

Jackie describes the local authority as *'no help whatsoever'.* Christine tells a more worrying story of her visit to the local authority, where she was given the homeless department's phone number and directions to a hostel which may have rooms (service 2). The directions turned out to be to a local B&B used by the council to house homeless families. Fortunately for Christine as it was cold, late and she did not know the city at this time, the woman working in the B&B there let her stay that night and then walked with her to the homeless accommodation in the morning.

Kelly was particularly critical of the local authority and their management of her case. Recently moved into the city from another area it is customary that housing benefit will not pay for you as you do not have a 'local connection'; there are as always extenuating circumstances, domestic abuse being one of them. She was waiting to see if this would officially apply to her situation, if it did not she may have to return to her hometown or face being street homeless which was inevitably causing her a lot of stress; *'I don't know if I'm coming or going with it all…I thought I were having another stroke because of it all…that was cause of the council'.*

Besides the local authority the most used service by these women was service number 2. The only accommodation at the time for single homeless people aged over 25 that was housing women as well as men. It also accommodated rough sleepers on camp beds in dining rooms and communal areas. All of the women I spoke to had begun their time at the hostel in the rough sleeping area. This arrangement was described to me by Debbie '*Until you go upstairs*

you have no rights whatsoever, they can kick me out if they want', she further explained the caveats placed on 'rough sleepers', *'they can kick you out in the morning from 9 o'clock till 6 o'clock at night'* . During this time rough sleepers were expected to leave the accommodation and return for the night after 6pm, although this was flexible dependant on the temperature. The thought process being that other services are open in the day.

Once the women had *'been promoted'* (Christine), they were able to stay at this accommodation for three months. Although this could be extended with special permissions by the local authority who paid their housing benefit. This was meant to ensure that both the hostel and residents were working towards moving forward. The women I spoke to had been there for varying degrees of time, up to six months as a maximum. For the woman who had been there six months, she had left the accommodation in the middle and returned shortly after, she counted it as one stay but it could technically be counted as her second visit. For the other women this was their first stay. Women spoke highly of the service '*They're quite good*' (Debbie), with bold statements such as '*I'm never leaving here I love it'* and *'I'd recommend anyone to live here'* (Lucy) being used. '*I think they're quite good with women actually, they're not bad'* (Debbie), shows that they did not feel that women were being impaired by being supported within a mixed hostel.

Staff were particularly highlighted in this service, showing their importance to the women and the running of the service overall, Debbie informed me that she '*get(s) on with staff*' and talked about her male keyworker positively, stating he was a *'nice bloke'* and that staff overall have *'been alright with [her]'.* Lucy was extremely positive about '*all the staff, the staff are amazing'.* It was also highlighted by this participant that any problems were sorted straight away, something she felt was important and helped to keep the accommodation safe and pleasant.

The support the staff were seen to offer was viewed as important to the women in moving forward and achieving their goals. Debbie had not had her first keyworker meeting yet as she had been staying in the rough sleeper element of the hostel, however she was positive and expectant about what was to come: Me - What have they helped with? '*Nothing yet only to get a room and that but they will help me now I've got my own worker and that'.* Lucy had many other services to compare this service too and it was obvious throughout her interview

she had a 'favourite' (service 5) but she stated about service 2 that *'you get as much help here'* high praise indeed! Christine was also positive about the support she was receiving and informed me that she had been given an opportunity to improve her opportunities once leaving the hostel; *'I've been working in the kitchen here, they've asked me to do voluntary…I need it for my CV'.* Furthermore she clarified her support by stating that *'the support I'm getting is making me a bit happier'.*

In addition to the staff the rooms and type of accommodation were important to the women in giving them sense of safety, independence and pride:
Debbie- *'I've got everything I need up there' 'I can go up to my room and shut my door' 'Got quite a nice room actually'*
Lucy - *'I've got the best room in the whole of the hostel'*
Christine - *'Quite nice'*
The women at times spoke to me about how they were a clean person and did not like dirty homes, dishes or rooms. It was important to them that they were viewed as capable of maintaining a property and that they were housed in accommodation that allowed them to demonstrate this and that they could have pride in.

This feedback is overwhelmingly positive, however as stated previously, during further conversation women did also divulge incidents that had occurred that raised concerns. Debbie, for example, told me that the people she was sharing with in her cluster were *'not nice'* and described her time in the rough sleeper cluster:
'I take loads of rubbish down there (in the cluster) they kick doors, shouting loads at night, cus I can't stop them coming in my room cus it's a communal kitchen. They turn all my lights on at 3 o clock in the morning, sometimes I end up going mad sometimes…but they're really loud sometimes, I can't handle them'
'Some of my stuff has been going missing'
About staying in the dining room – *'sometimes I did mind it…cause they were all drunk…'*

It seems strange then that since this was her limited experience of Service 2 that she would voice such positive views as she had done earlier. Service 2 had only opened its doors to women in the last year, previously there had only been one charity that could offer accommodation to single homeless women (service 5) and they could only provide 16 beds.

One explanation for the positive feedback then could be that the women were pleased to have somewhere they could now stay, somewhere there could be a roof over their heads. Additionally Debbie had just received a room upstairs and been assigned a keyworker. Positivity could therefore be attached to the hope with her own room and a member of staff to support her a lot of her previous issues living in the accommodation would stop and be solved. Again demonstrating the importance of the staff working within the homeless service.

Kelly also resided in service 2, she however had a different view to the other women, *'sometimes these places get depressing, here they're always fighting in rooms and that…'* she talked about her difficulties in finding out if she was able to stay where she was and her desire to remain in the city informing me how much her mood and mental health had improved since she lived here. However she did not apply this to the service or the staff, instead her environment and the other residents seemed to be the reason she wanted to leave.

Service 4 was used by five of the women and had been used for the longest time – intermittently – by most of the women. Some reporting to have accessed a drugs team since their early twenties. Used with varying degrees of frequency '*I ain't really seen my worker a lot*' due to non-attendance (Debbie) it had inconsistent reviews from the women. Jackie who reported to be abstinent for the past three years talked highly of the service and what they had done for her; *CDT that was the greatest help', 'when I moved to [this city] within 10 days my prescription was sorted out'.* Whereas other women who continued to use it felt that it had not really helped them to change their addiction and they had always slipped back into *'bad habits'.* As stated they also did not seem to see the connection of a drug service to support for homelessness. Having previously worked in this area I am aware that as a service they can offer a lot of advice regarding accommodation and there are landlords whom they have worked directly with to house clients, particularly as the connection between substance misuse and accommodation is undisputed.

Service 5 had the best reviews amongst the women. A small local charity they provide both accommodation and floating support to the homeless community. This accommodation consisted of a small number of beds for women, largely in shared accommodation or what they refer to as small hostels. Half of the women participants had previously used their support and lived in their accommodation. One of the women despite not having lived with

them for some time was still in contact with the service. In the year before these interviews took place the service had lost a lot of funding and was no longer able to provide accommodation on the same scale, helping to explain why despite such positive feedback none of the women were using them now.

The key reason for such positive feedback was once again the staff and the amount of support gained, described by Jackie as *'really helpful'* they offer help with financing, getting grants (for furniture and to pay off debts), budgeting loans and housing. Lucy told me *'I rate [the charity] they are an amazing charity'* when I enquired what difference they made she replied, *'Oh a lot of difference' 'They're just amazing they really are' 'If you've got any problems you can phone them…or go and see them'.* For Lucy the act of being seen to go 'above and beyond' was popular, she tells me that her keyworker within this charity gave her their own number when she was under the threat of domestic abuse and told her to call and leave a voicemail day or night. The same worker then collected her and her belongings from her flat when she was ready to leave and helped in the most practical way to escape the violence.

There were however still problems with the service that came in the form of other residents, Lucy tells how she was threatened by one of the other residents in the all women hostel she stayed in and that *'I used to put a wardrobe to my bedroom door and that'* to help her to feel safe when she was sleeping. This was resolved by moving her into mixed accommodation. Again the accommodation in service 5 was key and described by those who had stayed there as '*a lovely hostel'* (Jackie). It was the only service offering all female accommodation which for some of the women was of importance. Debbie advised that she would not like to stay with men, as she '*wouldn't be comfortable'* and she is *'more cautious of men [she] don't know than women'.* Jackie however felt it '*wouldn't bother'* her if she had to stay with men and Lucy said she prefers it *'I get on with men better than I do with women'* and had stayed in mixed accommodation with service 5 previously which had been very successful.

There was only one day centre in the city run by a local religious group (service 6). I met and spoke to Jackie at this service, *'I don't know if I'd have coped without them'.* She had been accessing the service for the last four years and they had helped her when she was previously homeless to find her current flat. She continued to attend as she felt *'the atmosphere is nice and pleasant and relaxed'* and despite – up until recently not needing them for help with

housing she appreciated that *'You can always bend someone's ear'.* Now that she was facing eviction she was hopeful that they would be able to help her again, there is a person that attends the centre that offers legal advice and they frequently let her use the phone to keep in touch with family and chase benefits and payments. A more informal support offering but one which has made a huge difference in her life, and the importance of the support staff and their ability to identify support needs and provide hope is still apparent.

The only service exclusively for women was service 7. Only one of the women stated they used the service, although they did not disclose that they themselves were a sex worker. Lucy had been using the service for years with support consisting of financial support, writing to charities to remove debt and trying to help with rent arrears. They offered a 'drop-in' support and also Lucy was able to call them for support at any time. All of the workers were female, although for Lucy this did not seem to influence her decision to use them.

One of the women (Hannah) had previously used an accommodation service for people with mental ill health (service 8). She had previously referred to this as being one of her most successful support placements, but when it was discussed further she was not so complimentary. Within the service she had her own room but the kitchen and bathroom facilities were shared, something she hated *'people stunk and were so dirty, I hated going to the toilet there, I was always cleaning up after them and making sure there stuff wasn't touching mine. They took my stuff too…',* she reported that staff *'did nothing'* to change this and left domestic duties to the residents. The building itself was old and there was a shared TV room. Hannah states you couldn't ever feel comfortable there, some of the residents were 'more poorly' than others, making it difficult for her to relax. When we discussed the support offered there; *'there wasn't really, they just made sure I saw the doctor'.* Hannah left this service to go to prison and was unable to return on her release due to her violence and her rent arrears.

Service 9 was a domestic abuse multi-service agency, meaning that it is mainly known for its work to support women fleeing domestic abuse – and used by Lucy for this purpose – but it also offered much more. Hannah and Lucy used this service for accommodation, its counselling service and youth project working with young people with mental ill health. They therefore had opposing views to the usefulness and fairness of the service overall.

Lucy was evicted from Service 9 due to complaints from the neighbours. The eviction was immediate and Lucy recalls how she was not given any recommendations for where she could move on to –

> *'[The manager] didn't recommend me to go anywhere else bearing in mind I didn't know my way around [the City the research is based] as I'd only lived there a month, he didn't tell me to go to any other organisation, he just said you've got an hour to move out'*

Several years later she went back to this service when seeking protection for her and her daughter as they were being threatened in their home, however she feels she was not treated fairly and that she was singled out because of her previous behaviour, *'cause it was me (cause the service didn't like me) they moved me out of [the city] to another'* and when she returned they *'made me move back to the house I was having trouble in'.* Her view of the staff is one of no understanding and no flexibility, both things she has highlighted she was offered in other services and that are therefore important to her in engaging with a service and finding one that works. She does not speak of the standard of accommodation here but says she would never use the service again.

By far the worst service discussed by any of the women is service 10 stayed in by Lucy. Described as '*bloody disgusting'* she tells some terrifying stories of her experiences and things she witnessed:

'You'd see people injecting in the groin. They'd be walking around the house with needles in their arms'

'Prostitutes taking men upstairs'

'I had all my stuff nicked they broke door down, took everything'

One of the main complaints was that there was no support worker and it was just a place to stay*; 'people have to live there cause they've nowhere to live'.* When I asked about the owner she informed me that it felt like they *'didn't care'.* A lack of security, support and good staff therefore meant the accommodation was not a service that she would recommend.

The final service is a young people's accommodation service (service 11) which had been used by Leah. There were positives and negatives about the service from her perspective; she liked living with other young people and the security of having a roof over her head (she had been

sofa surfing for some time), however, she felt that she did not receive *'any'* support from staff beyond initial form filling and that the night staff in particular had no control of the young people in the service. Leah reported feeling unsafe which led to her being evicted as she invited a friend round who was not allowed in as she wanted their protection. This is her only experience of support and therefore when we talked about other support services she may have used she tells me that she doesn't want them. A negative experience therefore can ensure that homeless women do not return for help or seek it elsewhere, another explanation perhaps for recurrent homelessness?

5.4 Summary

This chapter has explored single homeless women's homeless journeys and use of services, and highlighted the common themes between their lived experiences. The chapter begins by exploring the most common themes found in both the women's narratives and the supporting literature. It shows the prevalence of abuse, substance misuse and mental health amongst this homeless population. It connects these support issues with the impacts on their homeless journey, the research and them themselves; demonstrating how such issues can lead to further marginalisation in society, for example, offending behaviour. The theme of recurring homelessness is then explored with women demonstrating how intergenerational homelessness has influenced their current situations and how their homelessness may affect other generations, due to its importance this theme will be further discussed in Chapter 6. Further findings question the definitions used within this study and in wider homelessness legislation and support, they demonstrate that most of the women participants were mothers, although for a variety of reasons they did not have their children living with them; does this really make them single? How women remain hopeful despite these findings is shown within this chapter before finally their views of services are considered.

These findings raise a number of questions and points for discussion, as well as implications for practice which are addressed in the following chapter.

Chapter 6: Final Reflections

This chapter will explore the researches findings surrounding the impact of societal perception on single women's homelessness as well as the women's own 'poverty of expectation', the significance of time and place will also be demonstrated. It also discusses further the empirical findings of this study in particular the importance of women's own identity in receiving support and collates the findings considering how they reflect in the literature. Furthermore, this chapter offers realistic recommendations for practice and an insight into my ideal service.

At the beginning of the thesis it was advocated that homeless women have a different experience of homelessness than homeless men and that more therefore needed to be known about their experiences if we are to successfully support them (Reeve et al, 2006, Crisis, 2008). Previous research which addresses female homelessness has shown that their experience influences the way in which they attempt to exit homelessness and highlights that many of the issues for homeless people are exacerbated by being female (Watson, 1999, May et al, 2007, Bretherton and Pleace, 2018). Despite the general acceptance amongst researchers that women and men experience homelessness differently many services are being used by both men and women and do not differ in their content. Along with others I argue that to ignore the different circumstances affecting women and men in our response to homelessness is to ensure that we do not provide the correct support (Reeve et al, 2006, Bowpitt et al, 2011).

This thesis set out to explore how single homeless women experience homeless services, how services include them – or in fact if they do – in their service design and delivery and how the political climate surrounding this issue when this research began impacted on single homeless women. These final reflections will show how these questions have been answered and the contribution this research has made to knowledge.

Throughout this thesis it has been argued that women and the issue of gender has been ignored historically in research, and those studies that are available are limited in demonstrating a depth of understanding of women and their use of services; particularly within the context of the wider economic climate. This research has addressed that gap, exploring methodically the experiences of single homeless women when using homeless services. Firstly services were included in the research design and the views of service providers were compared with those sought from women. Additionally creative methods and a

life history model were utilised with women, followed by semi-structured interviews exploring the time lines that they created, allowing for a greater depth of understanding than most previous research which was reviewed in Chapter 2 and therefore it successfully contributes to the field of knowledge in this subject. The research on which this thesis is based explicitly explores how single homeless women use services, the barriers specific to their gender in exiting homelessness and how services can address these, whether services – both statutory and voluntary - include women in their design and delivery and how the structural and political environment that women inhabit impacts on their experiences.

The research was conducted within one British City, however many of the findings are comparable to previous studies and research into homelessness and therefore it is not unreasonable to assume that the findings are not unique to this City, making them relevant beyond where the fieldwork took place. The use of narrative methodology facilitated the construction of stories of single homeless women using a mixture of methods suitable for work with this population. The mixed methods and sensitive methodology supported women to articulate their homeless journeys and for the thesis to unpack the realities of being a single homeless woman during this time. In addition, allowing for acknowledgement of researcher positionality within the thesis enables the reader to gain an insight into the research process and therefore a deeper appreciation for the women's personal accounts.

A number of key findings have been highlighted throughout this thesis. Chapter 4 showed the service perspective of single women's homelessness and how 'new' the issue was for many of the professionals. Using narratives gathered from semi-structured interviews with professionals working with single homeless women it demonstrated challenges facing women in terms of access to services and receiving appropriate support. Chapter 5 showed the complexity of women's homelessness and the number of challenges they face in exiting it, both through their own individual circumstances and because of where they found themselves homeless.

Unlike previous research conducted focusing on a narrow section of female homelessness, this thesis has included single homeless women with a variety of characteristics due to a broad inclusion criteria meaning, adult, single (in the eyes of the authorities) and female using homeless services were the only criteria

This chapter begins by outlining where and how this research has answered the research questions, followed by how it therefore has contributed to knowledge. It continues by drawing together the key themes from chapters 4 and 5. The findings presented in those chapters highlight women's experiences of homeless services and the services views of women who use them; as well as the implications of changes within the welfare system and political agenda. The views of services were at times opposing to those of women. This chapter will argue it is important that services better understand where these disparities occur, the needs of single homeless women and the impact of women's experiences so they deliver support relevant to its users. Having opposing views meant that at times a coherent view was difficult to achieve, the discussion within this chapter allows for better understanding.

The chapter then goes onto locate the research within the wider literature before using a visual representation of the research to show the links between the empirical findings of the research. It recognises the importance of policy that reflects the lived experiences of single homeless women and offers recommendations for change based on the evidence presented. Finally, it explores the implications for practice and the principles of an ideal service before recommendations for future research identified from the research findings are presented.

6.1 Revisiting the research questions

6.1.1 Research question 1 - How do single homeless women experience homeless services?

This thesis demonstrates that women's experiences of homelessness are specific to their gender. Sections 6.1.1.1, 6.1.1.2 and 6.1.1.3 all demonstrate the specific ways that homelessness is impacted simply by being female – women's identity, single homeless women's lack of options and a woman's relationship needs are all discussed. The section concludes in 6.1.1.4 considering the ways in which single women's homelessness is impacted by finances.

6.1.1.1 Identity

'Whilst it does not exist per se, it continues to influence perceptions and has severe implications for those experiencing homelessness, as well as their sense of self. In such a

practice, a 'homeless identity' becomes the defining feature of a person's character, overshadowing all other axes of identity' (McCarthy, 2013)

Single homeless women included in this research were unwilling to acknowledge themselves as homeless until they felt they had no other option. This was epitomised by many through approaching services specifically for homeless people as late as possible into their homeless journey. This delay often meant two things for women; firstly that by the time they were engaged with a service they were already embedded in a homeless culture and secondly that their needs had often progressed to complex (discussed further in section 6.1.2.4). For services this meant that working with homeless women often required more intense working, repeated contact and addressing multiple causes of homelessness at one time. A key reason for this delay in approaching services could be linked to how single homeless women identify themselves. The next section explores how homelessness and being single is determined and why women may not want to identify themselves as such; to be single and homeless is felt to be 'against nature' (Phillips, 1998).

6.1.1.1.1 Am I homeless?

When analysing the data collected from the women a large contradiction of the study itself became apparent. During completion of the timelines seven of the women described repeated periods of homelessness, including periods of 'sofa surfing', reliance on family and use of other homeless services, however they did not always describe **themselves** as homeless. A reliance on family and friends was accepted and not seen as being homeless.

Literature frequently describes a person who would meet the legal definition of homeless (not having a home – varying reasons given) but who would not be represented in any local authority statistics – usually because they have not presented themselves as homeless or sought support, or perhaps they would not be included in rough sleeper counts, as part of the 'hidden homeless'. 'The hidden truth about homelessness' released in 2011 found that hidden homelessness was more prevalent in single people and included those sofa surfing, squatting, living in B&B's, or in prisons and hospitals (Reeve and Batty). In addition the study demonstrated that participants had generally spent three times as long being 'hidden' than they had in formal homelessness provision (Reeve and Batty, 2011). Similar reports show high percentages of women included had spent time sofa surfing (40 percent) before accessing formal provision and highlight the risks that sofa surfing presents – insecurity, physical danger,

exploitation and poor conditions (Smith and Miles, 2017). St Mungo's have previously highlighted how women's homelessness is often hidden and its links with sustained homelessness (Bretherton and Pleace, 2018). Their evidence also shows that women describe themselves as sofa surfing **before** they become homeless. For the women whose narratives are included in this thesis there was an overwhelming sense that only when street homeless or using homeless accommodation services did they ever see themselves as actually homeless. Quite often the term 'roofless' could be used more accurately with women.

As shown in Chapter 4 the definition of homelessness was also difficult for the services. All of the services agreed that to be without a home means you are homeless but staying with friends and family was not uniformly accepted as homeless by the services and not all of the accommodation services referred to their clients as homeless (apart from on official paperwork) once they were living with them. It is understandable then that it would be difficult for the women themselves to know how to define themselves as homeless.

Within the literature explored in Chapter 2 the definition of homelessness varies widely dependant on the purpose of its use. Shelter start their definition quite simply by stating that 'the definition of homelessness means not having a home' (www.shelter.org.uk). A home however is a varied and individual perceived idea. This thesis has described at length the conditions in which these women have lived prior to their participation in this study, conditions they have endured whilst they would not have described themselves as homeless but rather to have a home. To understand when somebody may consider themselves homeless therefore we would need to begin to understand what is a home to them? This idea is supported by Swain (2011) who believes only once we understand **who** is homeless and **why** they are homeless can we begin to solve the issue of homelessness.

Shelter go on to say that those who are staying with friends and family, staying in a hostel, night shelter or B&B, squatting, at risk of violence or abuse in their homes, living in poor conditions that affect their health or those living apart from their family because they do not have a place to live together would all be considered homeless (accessed 29/05/19). Homelessness therefore is more than just rooflessness. A home should offer more than just a tangible place to be, it should provide safety, a base from which to achieve and in which to belong. Homelessness then is the loss of any or all of these.

However, there are those that have never experienced a home in the way described above. I argue that if a person has lived for long periods in abusive or squalid conditions then how they identify a home would be heavily influenced, therefore, recognising when they do not have one is much more difficult. For the women included in this study 'not having a home' simply meant not having a roof and as demonstrated in Chapter 5, having a roof was not always enough to ensure these women avoided homelessness. Perhaps having a 'home' that means more than just a roof may provide them with a more sustainable accommodation and the independence and privacy they wanted. But how can they be supported to find a home when they and the services supporting them are not clear on what one is? The data indicates that if services focus on establishing an environment in which women can create and experience a 'home' and then work towards achieving this independently it would support women to sustain this long term.

The impact of women not identifying themselves as homeless at earlier stages in their narratives is that they were not receiving professional support and guidance during these times. Early intervention in a homeless journey by services has been identified as key in preventing and ending homeless journeys. The introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act (2018) shows the recognition by government and services of the need to prioritise prevention of homelessness and act as early possible to reduce the impact and recurrence of homelessness with responsibility established at a local level. A report by Homeless Link entitled 'Preventing homelessness before it begins' (2018) states that intervening early in the homeless journey can not only result in the circumstances not ever reaching 'crisis point', but can actually impact wider services such as mental health provision by reducing demand; resulting in not only less strain on those services but also less cost to the general public (p16).

6.1.1.1.2 What if I am homeless?

In addition to women not being able to identify a home is their general unwillingness to admit when they are homeless. Research focusing on rough sleeping has historically argued that despite it being considered the most visible part of homelessness, women are still not very visible, and actually many would consider them to be rare in the world of street homelessness (Casey et al, 2008). Stigma has been presented as one of the reasons for women being keen to remain invisible and was highlighted by the services as a major reason that women may not want to identify themselves as homeless. During the interviews they talked about the embarrassment women feel and that some of the women they work with *'haven't told their*

family and things like that' (Service 5). In 1963, Goffman drew attention to the importance of identity, and in particular people's resistance to appearing 'spoiled' which refers to those who do not fit societal 'norms' and face the everyday stigma of those that do. For women this 'spoiled identity' not only relates to being homeless but also to being female and homeless.

A further explanation offered by services in Chapter 4, as to why women may not want to identify themselves as homeless is linked to six out of the eight women being mothers. The services predicted the findings of this research; that many of the single women they worked with were mothers. The women participating in this study had all lived with their children before they were homeless. Some had continued to live with their children when they were homeless, but most had lost custody or the relationship with their children once homelessness had been admitted. Two different conclusions can be drawn from this, firstly that their situation had worsened to such a point that they were forced to identify as homeless and to continue parenting in the same way was not possible. Secondly, that a major concern of acknowledging difficulties in their home conditions was the fear of social care involvement and of 'losing' their children which in turn allowed the conditions to worsen which led to the circumstances referred to in the first conclusion.

It could be argued then that there is little homeless services can do in terms of encouraging women to present themselves as homeless if it is the stigma of female homelessness combined with the fear of intervention of professional organisations which is leading to the women being unwilling to admit they need support and help. Rather this suggests that to support women sooner a change of attitude is necessary beyond the homeless services they use. To ensure early intervention, a tolerance and acknowledgement of women's living conditions and needs has to be achieved within society.

However, services can still be responsible for women identifying themselves as homeless sooner. As demonstrated in Chapter 5 this study found that the first service approached by women was the local authority and it was here that they found the least support. Confusion about the services on offer and where they were, the length of time it took for decisions effecting these women's living situations and a general inability to help were all raised by the women. One of the major issues within the local authority is their definition of homelessness. They use the statutory definition to decide if a woman has a priority need. As revealed all of the women within this study would be considered to be without a priority need. They would therefore not be defined by the local authority as homeless. If this first experience of homeless

services is a negative one, that tells them that they are not in fact considered homeless then this could inevitably lead women to not define themselves as homeless either; therefore delaying women in asking for and receiving support as early as possible. The women's first encounter of homeless services is therefore shown to be imperative and although they may not be able to change the support or advice they can offer to women initially, all services need to provide strong links to other services working within different definitions and should always maintain that these women are in fact homeless.

6.1.1.1.3 Am I single?

It is also important to consider that the narratives show that women did not identify themselves as single, they had partners and children. As shown in the findings their children were not living with them at this time for a variety of reasons, but they still considered themselves mothers and therefore felt that their home should accommodate their children. The services however were working with them as single women and searching for accommodation on that basis. None of the services, and perhaps most importantly in the accommodation services, I spoke with, talked about a place for their families to come and visit them in the service, in fact visitors (of any kind) were not allowed into residents bedrooms for safety reasons within the accommodation services, widening the gap between them and their loved ones.

Furthermore, as all services worked with women to create a plan of action to move forward, non-single women entering into a plan for a single woman around their future must seem a little like Sophie's choice. To get a residence of any kind they must accept that it will be accommodation appropriate for a single person – a room in a shared house, a bedsit or perhaps a one bedroom flat. They would have to accept that in this accommodation they would not be able to 'officially' provide space for loved ones and it would therefore not encompass the vision of their future home. They would also have to accept that they are, by law, single; reinforcing the fact that they are separated from their children. Further research could inform us of the impact of this on a woman's identity and sense of self.

The lack of support for women as mothers by the services could be interpreted from the lack of multi-agency working with family services. As highlighted in Chapter 5 the women talked about each service as separate entities, yet in Chapter 4 all of the agencies said they participated in multi-agency working. In reality, this multi-agency working was in the main with other homeless services. When a child is estranged from its parent there is normally some

social care involvement, it would therefore seem inconceivable that none of the women accessing these services were working with social care for this reason, yet none of the services or women spoke of joint working between social care and services in terms of parenting. Their role as a mother is key to the identity of women with children, partnership working between these services therefore could be instrumental in providing accommodation for women that is deemed suitable for mothers, making it more sustainable.

In fact to adequately provide support the services working with women should also consider how women **do** identify themselves. If they are not identifying as homeless and single then helping them with homelessness as a single woman seems impractical.

6.1.1.2 Poverty of expectations

It is important to recognise here that single homeless women did not benefit from the legislation surrounding homelessness, despite arguments that a 'priority need' being offered to those fleeing domestic abuse predominantly supports women. All of the women included in this study had experienced abuse and found themselves in the same situation as other homeless males. In fact the opposite may be true, legislation may actually be reinforcing the identity crisis effecting single homeless women by distinguishing so forcefully between homeless families and single homelessness. Despite the majority of these women being mothers they were not able to identify themselves as part of a family in their current homeless situation.

Neither did single homeless women benefit from the accommodation and support services available to them. The services predominantly supported men. Accommodation services had been set up previously to support men and therefore were designed for this purpose. Women therefore were hindered by the structural elements of the services on offer; for example they had less choice of services, the support was not female specific and there was a lack of understanding of what it meant to be female and homeless. Access to services was also an issue for women as less resources were reserved for supporting women.

The findings also emphasised a poverty in the expectations of single homeless women. Prior circumstances to approaching services were an important indicator to how the women responded to services; this relates to both those circumstances created by their personal

experiences and also the prevalence of services and therefore their ability to access homeless services in the past.

The timing is particularly imperative to this study due to the impact the restructure had on single adult homeless women. At the time of conducting this research it was clear that more services had been made available to women recently. In the years prior to this research there were approximately sixteen beds set aside specifically for single homeless women aged over 18. In theory the changes to the way services were being delivered meant that provision had therefore expanded with a new 80 bed hostel offering beds for women, men and couples aged over 25. Within this new structure the service previously offering the sixteen beds was no longer funded and therefore this accommodation was lost, but within the new hostel – technically - there was no upper limit to how many of these beds could be made available for women. This potentially created an environment in which ALL registered single homeless women could be housed as the amount of short term supported accommodation available had increased dramatically. In reality however this was not the case, the service themselves explained to me, as part of the mapping study, they had to consider where women were roomed and where possible they inhabited a female only 'pod', made up of four – five bedrooms all en-suite and a shared kitchen. This meant overall this service offered just a small proportion of their bedrooms to women out of their possible 80. This pod was in a separate section to the male residents – of whom there were many more – which made it difficult if the pod was full and there were not enough other women presenting themselves to the service at the time to 'justify' the use of a whole other pod (evidence taken from interview with Service 5).

For under 25's there was in real terms a reduction in beds, with a pre-existing 60+ bed hostel now being the main hub offering accommodation. Preference however was given to those aged 16-18 who were also housed here and to whom the council automatically had a duty of care. The idea behind this was to move young people out of hostels, however it left a huge deficit for young people aged 18-24 and in real terms they faced using charities and friends and family until they could be more sustainably housed in local authority housing.

Six of the eight women who took part in the study were over the age of 25. The 'increase' of provision for them led to these women's stories being typically positive about the fact that they could now access **some** support, they were now being directed somewhere rather than

being told they were not in a priority need category (and therefore would not be offered urgent assistance) and advised to join the housing list. They believed that they had more options than they had previously and that the risks of being street homeless had been reduced. It would be wise to note here that the women were using services and therefore had received some support from them. Their narratives when analysed however also exhibit obstructions to what was on offer.

6.1.1.2.1 Suitability of Services

Firstly, service provision was still inadequate, there were simply still not enough services. Women were still struggling to access the services. The local authority now had one main hub to refer to, and they had one main hostel in which to immediately place them. As previously explained this is a shared accommodation made up of men, women and couples and was predominantly full leading to women accessing their 'rough sleeper' service – a camp bed in one of the lounges or kitchens until they were moved to one of the hostel rooms.

The women who had made use of the rough sleeper service spoke about their time staying in the living areas. They were understandably pleased that they were not having to sleep on the streets and that they were able to stay in a place made safe (in comparison to rough sleeping) by the presence of staff and the ability to make use of the toileting, bathing and cooking facilities. They also felt hopeful due to the promises of a room once one became available if they made use of this service *'that's why I'm sticking it out' (Debbie).* Kelly told me that *'It is so horrible on the streets'* but that *'It's not like that here'* and Lucy told me that she was *'never leaving here'.*

This initial rhetoric should not be ignored and it does demonstrate that there has been some recognition by services of female homelessness within the city and that changes to service commissioning needed to be made - an important starting point in decreasing the number of single homeless women. Furthermore, when put into this context the positive rhetoric is understandable, however in the women's discussions about their time in the rough sleeper's service they highlighted several problems that this type of living can create, some of which are shown below.

Debbie was in the rough sleeping accommodation during our first interview and informed me that *'until you go upstairs you have no rights whatsoever, they can kick me out if they want'.* Upstairs refers to one of the hostel rooms which gives residents the right to stay for three months (as long as they adhere to the tenancy agreement conditions and pay their service charge), it also is the point during which they are assigned a key worker and have more structured support for reintegration into society. The conditions of the rough sleeper 'area' of the hostel are described by Debbie in this interview:

> *'I take loads of rubbish down here, they kick doors, shouting loads at night, cus I can't stop them coming in my room cus it's a communal kitchen. They turn all my lights on at three o'clock in the morning, sometimes I end up going mad sometimes…but they're really loud sometimes, I can't handle them'*

Christine also talks of *'being promoted'* when she is provided with a hostel room rather than being housed within the rough sleeping 'cluster' and speaks positively stating the room is *'quite nice as well'.*

As described, violence, aggression and a lack of privacy are apparent in these living conditions and this woman's experience should be described as anything but positive. An exacerbation of fear and helplessness can be heard and the circumstances from which many of these women have come - a background of abuse and violence – are repeated and continued here in the service even though they themselves may not be recognising it. Further descriptions of women using furniture to blockade their room door after 'promotion' to a more long term hostel room in an attempt to prevent other residents accessing their room without consent add to the sense of vulnerability experienced by these women using these homeless services.

Questions can be asked then about how to measure a services' suitability for women. If women themselves are asked they say they are happy with the service, yet the data demonstrates that women are still at risk within these services and that there is potential for services to increase rather than diminish the danger that women who are homeless face. In reality how far are these services able to create an environment where women can begin to see life differently and perhaps make different choices? How much can they really leave their previous fears and defensive behaviours to move forward positively and free from the circumstances that have led them to homelessness in the first place? The answer to this surely lies in the situation from which a woman has come – how much better are the services than

her previous existence? And considering the narratives the women shared should this really be our measure? The answer of course is no.

6.1.1.2.2 When your needs aren't met…

The research on which this thesis is based found that despite literary evidence to the contrary the women were not overwhelmingly opposed to male and female mixed accommodation (Cramer 2002, Reeve, Casey and Goudie, 2006 and Henry et al 2010). In fact only two of the women voiced concerns about this, and others such as Jackie stated that *'it wouldn't bother me'.* This indifference seems at odds with the stories told of abuse inflicted on all the women spoken to, largely by men. It is also in direct contrast to the view of services who felt the biggest barrier facing women accessing these services is that they were in the minority. Service 6 stated that '*the prospect of moving into a community that is predominantly male often just holds women back, they just won't, they won't look at it*' and services 5 and 7 both provided evidence of women who had refused their support and accommodation due to the men also accessing this service; *'we've had cases where people have turned down the offer of a bed here saying no I don't want to be here with other men' (service 7), 'I've had women that have walked in and walked straight back out, they've refused to do a referral'* (service 5).

Perhaps then although this study cannot ignore its surface finding it should be considered that the women participating are those women who have already made the choice to use a service also supporting males. It therefore cannot provide evidence for those women who are even more 'hidden' and in that way vulnerable. A service that works solely with women would surely allow these women to access support also.

6.1.1.2.3 Availability of Services

To continue the theme discussed above regarding the women's true ability to be 'happy' with their services, despite the narrative they present, the lack of availability of a single women's only service – and therefore choice - needs to be acknowledged. A major problem that became apparent during the mapping stage of the study is the absence of an accommodation service solely for women. There is no single female only accommodation available in the city in which the research is based and single women will only be housed if they meet the criteria to be offered a statutory duty. This therefore means that single women without a 'priority need' (such as all the women in this study) will be signposted to a service that also supports men. As

the women's life stories demonstrate their needs are high and at the point of accessing a homeless service often urgent meaning the necessity for support may override women's reservations of being housed with men. This is not the same as not preferring an all-women's support service.

Furthermore, as referred to in Chapter 4 and 5 the women's apparent reliance on men could help to understand their response in this study to not being averse to mixed accommodation. Within the women's narratives, abusive relationships and a willingness to return to them was a frequent theme. Often the reasons they returned were to ensure accommodation for themselves and their families, despite the risk that may be posed to their own health. For these women, their housing and financial situations were inextricably linked forcing them to rely on the men in their lives even if they had been abusive.

In history 'women have been regarded as 'by nature' both unsuited to the public realm and rightly dependant on men and subordinated within the family' (p118; Phillips, 1998). Over the years there is wide acceptance that this view has changed, however to what degree could certainly be argued through these women's stories. There was a sense from the women that they may need a man to complete a home, and Hooper (1996) argues that they could be judged quite harshly if they do not have one. This could be most vividly felt when the women talked more positively about periods of their lives, which for all included a period of time with their families and for five of the women their time in a settled relationship – even if that would not be considered healthy from an observer.

Could then the accommodation services set up to support single homeless women by providing a stable environment in which to begin reintegration into mainstream society be inadvertently maintaining these women's circumstances and dependence prior to and during homelessness simply by being a mixed accommodation? If so then we can surmise that women leaving these accommodations will do so with the same reliance on men. A 'revolving door' of homelessness is often discussed by theorists and practitioners alike, and my own experience within the homeless field showed me that often within these services the majority of their users are returning customers. This research provides evidence to suggest that the very way in which some of these services have been established (supporting both men and women) may

well be encouraging these women's adversity and disadvantage to continue and therefore the cycle of homelessness to continue for them also.

The women participants all shared a desire for more independence and choice when it came to homeless services. The evidence within this thesis demonstrates that despite a radical overhaul in the way in which these services are being delivered the availability of women's homeless services has not increased and in real terms perhaps has been reduced. Despite a seemingly positive rhetoric then of what is on offer for them the reality remains that for women their needs are still not being met.

6.1.1.3 Relationships

Once working with services single homeless women's experiences were dependant on two things – their prior circumstance – as discussed in section 6.1.1.2 - and their relationship with their 'keyworker'. The relationships with services and their keyworkers were crucial in creating a positive experience for women. Ultimately single homeless women need a service that offers them time, compassion, a positive relationship and practical guidance on multiple problems. As discussed in the previous section there is some disagreement between this study's findings and others about whether accommodation projects should be women's only services. However, as previously suggested this may simply be because they were not able to experience one in this city. Women using these services described some disturbing encounters experienced within mixed accommodation services as well as novel if not frightening methods used to survive; suggesting that they may be more 'bothered' if they had a choice.

6.1.1.3.1 Relationships with services

The data not only shows that services are not yet meeting the needs of women it also revealed that although they seem to be aware of the needs of the women they are working with, services views on how to support women were different to the women's own views.

As stated in Chapter 4 eight of the 10 services interviewed felt that the homeless women they worked with were more vulnerable than homeless men. They spoke of the physical size of women in comparison to men, the fact that they were outnumbered by homeless men and their 'general gender make up' (service 3). This feeling was echoed by the women themselves. Kelly described herself as 'very, very, very vulnerable' and Jackie informed me that from what

she had witnessed being homeless there was 'a hell of a lot more men'. However, Lucy disagreed with this in her interview and stated that she did not think there was overall less female homelessness '*not if you see the women coming in here…I think it's equal'*, however she did feel that women were more vulnerable when they were homeless; *'women are more vulnerable than men…a woman has more chance of getting raped'*. Lucy also referred to the women's menstrual cycle as a significant issue for homeless women when they have no secure accommodation –

'Women have ladies problems…I've known girls out there, who sleep outside who have periods and they can't wash…how can they clean themselves bless them?'

Despite this acknowledgement, Chapter 4 shows that seven out of nine services said they worked with women in the same way they did men and although on further analysis there seemed to be subtle differences, this was principally due to the attitude of the staff working with the women rather than in the organisational structure as a whole. Staff, although able to pinpoint difference in the needs of the women they were working with were therefore not able to make substantial changes in their provision. A service still needed to be delivered in a mixed environment for example and assessments and working methods routinely used with men in the service were also applied to women. The timing of this research may provide some of the answers as to why this was the case within some of the services. For two of the four mixed accommodation services they had only recently started working with women under the new restructured homeless services and were using the same working practices and applying the same training to women that they had historically used and received for men.

The evidence gathered from women's narratives also showed that for the women their drive to exit homelessness focused around the need of others especially their children. Debbie states that her aims for her future are to '*try and get [her] own house, start all over again, but this time I'm not losing it, I can see my grandkids'*. In addition the participants overwhelmingly identified themselves as women, mothers and as part of a family. When the services were asked what they supported the women with however they spoke of housing, finances, addiction and life skills. Of course to maintain a home these practical skills are incredibly important, they are not however the motivators or focus of the women themselves. Services need to consider the drive for women exiting homelessness if they are to support them in achieving it. In addition to practical living skills they need to offer support to increase the

women's confidence for living in society independently. This could include programmes for increased understanding of abuse and recognition of the signs, the provision of tools to manage emotions and education about relationships.

6.1.1.3.2 Relationship with their keyworker

The most successful and positive stories told by the women about the services seemed to be when women felt they had achieved progress within their lives and therefore had improved confidence and renewed hope – even if only for a little while. Key to complimentary feedback for services seemed to be the support of a member of staff within those services, normally their 'keyworker', or even the hope of what could be achieved with the support of their keyworker. This view is supported by research conducted by Hedderman et al (2011) looking at female offenders using a project designed to promote desistance. They found that women's relationship with their keyworker was important to the women. Where the key worker was seen to be 'personally interested' in them women were more accepting of their support and willing to receive reminders of tasks and appointments without feeling they were being told what to do. The women were even found to be more likely to complete tasks such as attend work interviews or abstain from drug use as they felt not doing so would mean they had let their key worker down (p11).

Lucy in particular was keen to stress the support she had received from one service, and her key worker there. She informed me how she had been supported out of an abusive relationship and how the keyworker had given her their personal mobile number telling her to call her 'any time day or night', describing her as amazing and that the support received made 'oh a lot of difference'. The support she received by this keyworker reflected positively on the organisation they worked for overall describing them as 'amazing' and stating that she felt she could go back to them whenever she needed. For Lucy a positive working relationship was one where its balance was in her favour and one at times that blurred lines and boundaries – particularly those between professional and friendship.

For all of the women relationships that were spoken of most positively were ones that had been built up over a long period of time or where the support workers had shown commitment, willing and an ability to provide answers. In fact they were ones where the relationships held were a good example to the women of a healthy relationship in life - honest, giving and respectful.

6.1.2 Research question 2 - What is the influence of gender on service design and delivery?

This thesis supports the view that gender did not influence service design and delivery. As described above the 'mapping study' conducted with services found that services predominantly worked with women using the same methods they used for working with men, despite wide recognition that women's experiences were different. In fact only two of the services reported they had even attended any training specific to working with women. Services reported using 'person centred support' to work with individuals and therefore felt that they could differentiate the way in which they worked with all individuals, meaning women did not need any specific methods.

The impact of this can be shown in the lack of engagement services reported by women. Women stated they were keen to engage and felt positive that the services they were working with could help. However, services described recurrent missed appointments in their female clients and questioned whether many of the women were ready for change. This chapter later addresses this issue and outlines some recommendations for services working with females, in particular improved training and consideration of methods designed specifically for working with homeless women.

6.1.2.1 Lack of engagement discussed by services

Despite the women seeming keen to engage with workers, particularly at the outset of entering a service, and being hopeful in what could be achieved, services spoke frequently about the lack of engagement they received from their homeless clients. Appointments with workers were not always seen as a priority for women due to the competing pressures placed on them at the point of support being offered – management of addiction, mental health, relationships and at times numerous services being involved. I found this to be true as a homeless practitioner and as part of the research process with many interview appointments not kept and no notice being given. It was surprising then the hope and emphasis the women placed on the support they may receive, as outward appearances can suggest that they are resistant to assistance, not ready for change or disbelieving of the process.

As identified in the findings poor or negative relationships of all kinds were apparent in all of the women's lives prior to and during their experience of homelessness. This could possibly explain why women may be anxious about engaging with an individual, or organisation as a

whole, with whom they share no history, or why they may not be seen to prioritise it despite their acknowledgement in the findings that they understand its importance. Furthermore, lives as explained through the narratives of the women are evidently fraught with stress and lacking in structure. A woman with no schedule suffering with issues of addiction and/or mental health may have trouble remembering the date and time, as well as appointments, they are also likely to prioritise their short term needs if they are not being met, such as their drug or alcohol usage over their more long term goals of creating themselves an environment from which to make a home – which the services are focused on.

6.1.2.2 How are single homeless women included?

With conflicting agendas – and viewpoints of what constitutes good engagement - between clients and services, it poses challenges for how women can be encouraged to engage. Best practice for homeless services suggest that 'co-production' is key and that 'when services are genuinely co-produced they work better because they make the most of the shared expertise of the professionals who work there and the people who have experience of using them' (Homeless Link (c), 2017, 3). One definition of co-production is 'people who use services being consulted, included and working together from the start to the end of any project that affects them' (Think Local Act Personal, 2011). A tool-kit for co-production created by homeless link explains the theory of co-production; engagement levels will rise if your provisions are based more on what people want rather than what professionals believe they need, not only because service users are happier but because if they are involved in the design of the service then they will feel more valued (p3). Sheikh and Teeman (2018) conducting an assessment for Crisis also found that 'people with lived experience of homelessness should be involved in co-designing evaluation and services and be at the centre of all provision' (p72).

Co-production however does present its own challenges. Based on the evidence that has been presented in this thesis it would not be unreasonable to suggest that some homeless women may need support to fully engage with co-production. As suggested by Needham and Carr (2009) 'co-productive schemes may side-line groups that have been generally marginalised and underserved' including the homeless. They argue for an individual to effectively participate in co-production they need to be effective in engaging with others and have an understanding of the norms and values of wider society so that links can be made between communities – or have 'social capital'. For those whom may have been living on the fringes of society and are in need of greater support to live independently, to actively influence their own support may

prove difficult and their own social capital may be reduced. However, with the correct support it is also acknowledged that social capital could be built through co-production, allowing women to gain strength, knowledge and independence through increased confidence and empowerment (Homeless Link (c), 2017).

Other arguments challenging the use of co-production within services suggest that co-production places responsibility for services to work on service users, and that service users may feel they have to participate to gain the support they need (Needham and Carr, 2009). This would be particularly difficult for homeless women for whom, as evidence has shown within this thesis, identities have been influenced by societal ideals and views. An inability or desire to participate could therefore create an additional barrier to support – already shown to frequently be received too late – in that they may choose not to access this support, or feel that they are not able (or worthy) of accessing support. Homeless Link (c) (2017) discuss the need for co-production to be accessible at different levels, and for it to be a journey, starting with the need to focus on people's strengths and building confidence and self-development. If this is possible then this could reduce the barriers presented by the idea of co-production, simple things such as assessments not wholly focusing on support needs but asking what is good and what are your strengths could mean barriers to accessing services could be reduced.

The issue of power is one of the central arguments levied against co-production, the ideal relationship would diminish ANY power imbalance, but the question remains - is this really possible when women still require the guidance and support of the professionals they are producing with? Furthermore, for services to positively engage with co-production they would need to be willing to relinquish some of their 'power', however due to organisational needs and perspectives this is likely to be difficult to achieve. Service users would need to be given more detail and information about how services and wider organisations work requiring open discussions between services, stakeholders, local authorities and homeless women. The cost and time associated with this therefore could prove prohibitive. Nevertheless although full co-production may prove challenging with increased training and strong communication helping to address any current power balance creating more equality between services and those it supports is possible.

Within the research on which this thesis is based there was no evidence presented by neither the women themselves nor the services for how service users are included in the production of the services or its delivery. Despite its challenges it is easy to see that better inclusion of

service users within service design would improve services, making them more suitable and accessible and increase confidence amongst service users both in themselves and the service as a whole. More research would need to be conducted to ascertain how or if this co-production philosophy – or parts of it - have been adopted. It seems likely that where it has been then the trust between the services and the women would increase, creating an environment in which women could move forward and make positive changes.

6.1.2.3 Readiness for change

Creating positive changes seemed to be the one overall objective of all the homeless services. However the caveat to this seemed to be whether the people they were working with were actually ready for change. This thought process was echoed by Lucy who recognised that at some stages in her journey she had not been ready to accept help and support or indeed been ready for the change that might arise if she did. The findings shown in Chapter 5 demonstrate the varying stages that women are at in their homeless journey and the varying pathways into homelessness for the women. Although many similarities occur in terms of use of substances and mental ill health, the wide spectrum that they encompass is an example of the many ways in which a person can need help. Their stories are also a demonstration of the unreliability of assuming when a person will want support based on the same difficulty in somebody else. All of the women seemed to ask for help at a later stage than imagined, as discussed above, but all were experiencing different physical, mental and emotional circumstances when they did so. Factor in the many different coping strategies and levels of resilience encompassed by the women and even more differences occur. The idea of working with individuals in the same manner or adapting the same approach is therefore not one that can be acted on.

Person centred support was considered to be used by all of the services and was the principal reason given for not offering any structured differentiation of support to women rather than men, as the services felt that they offered a service that worked with the individual and their individual needs; therefore if they were male or female was of no consequence as they would be supported for their individual needs. The person-centred approach is widely used within support work and is far reaching within counselling work. Within homelessness support it is essentially putting the individual at the centre of the work you are doing, ensuring the individual is in control of the work that is happening and it occurs at their pace, in addition no decisions about support should be made without the individuals knowledge. Using the person centred approach is thought to be useful, although some studies have shown that it is more

useful if the service offering it is able to provide the appropriate additional support – maybe the use of specific services such as addiction services – when needed and in this way it is more important that a service is ready to meet the needs of homeless people rather than a homeless person being ready to make a change (Sheikh and Teeman, 2018).

The women included here showed varying degrees of readiness in their narratives in terms of complexities of need. Some of the women spoke of years of entrenched homelessness combined with years of substance misuse and repeated use of services. Some of the women discussed fairly simple needs in comparison and therefore could be considered as more 'ready' for an exit out of homelessness. On analysis however even their stories demonstrated recurrent periods of homelessness, repeated relationship breakdowns and for some, like Leah and Bethany, a sense of insecurity surrounding their current housing situation, despite it being intended as a permanent move.

6.1.2.4 Complexities

The section concludes by considering how the complexity of single women's homelessness impacts greatly on their experiences of services. This study shows that the single women experiencing homelessness are frequently and simultaneously experiencing a multitude of other problems, meaning they require joined up and comprehensive support. Their complex needs sometimes makes it difficult for women to engage with services even when contact has been made, for example because they have forgotten appointments. These complexities are also partly the reason women have remained an under researched area of homelessness.

Due to the modest size of the sample participating in this study it is not reasonable to suggest its findings are representative of all homeless women using homeless services but this study can offer an insight into the subjective experience of a single homeless woman in this city at this time. In particular, it sheds light onto the fact that single female homelessness is complex and that they are excluded in society in many different ways. One such point of exclusion is the high levels of mental health experienced by the women included in this thesis. All of the women participants shared experiences of mental illness although as shown in Chapter 5 the impact of this on their homeless experience, or their experience of homeless services, was not always recognised. Similarly the high levels of substance use amongst the women meant that they faced another level of exclusion within society.

'Multiple-exclusion homelessness' (MEH) is considered a 'a form of 'deep' social exclusion involving not just homelessness but also substance misuse, institutional care (e.g. prison) and/or involvement in 'street culture' activities (e.g. begging and street drinking)' (Fitzpatrick, S, Bramley, G and Johnsen, S, 2012).

A characteristic of MEH is that visible periods of homelessness follow periods of hidden homelessness, such as sofa surfing. Three of the services referred to the women's desire to remain hidden, with sofa surfing and moving from one relationship to another given as examples (service 3). The existing literature has shown that recurrent homelessness is primarily a concern for those members of the homeless population that have multiple and complex needs. This study supports this argument. History of abuse, use of substances and a precarious childhood were all factors for the seven women experiencing repeated homelessness. However, the existing literature also supports the idea that multiple episodes of homelessness is something more commonly experienced by men and that generally it is experienced by a small number of the homeless population (Pleace, Bretherton, Mayock in Bretherton and Mayock 2016). This thesis would argue that this is not the case, rather - that as was the reality for the female participants - people reporting themselves as homeless now may only just be recognising a situation they have in fact experienced previously and that the low numbers of the homeless population reporting repeated homelessness is more about how the homeless identify homelessness.

Bretherton et al (2016), argue that women's experiences of long term homelessness is not recognised in contemporary literature and that consequentially 'knowledge and understanding of women's particular experience of long-term homelessness is weak' which proposes a problem for policy making and services hoping to support this population (p210). The narratives shared by the women demonstrate overwhelmingly experiences of hidden homelessness, substance misuse and deep levels of exclusion suggesting that female homelessness can and should be considered part of MEH and complex and addressed as such within services and policy.

6.1.3 Research question 3 – How do current and planned political and structural changes effect women's homelessness and services supporting homeless women?

The final objective of the thesis was to find out how current and planned political and structural changes will affect women's homelessness and use of services. Financial concerns

were key to women's situations. The need for money to support themselves and others, including their children, dictated at some point all of these women's living situations. When they could not rely on the government, perhaps because they did not fit the correct criteria is when women begin to find the situation increasingly difficult to manage and control.

As you will read women did not appear to be 'concerned' about the changes occurring through welfare reform and to their benefits, despite the certainty that they would be affected. Services however were greatly concerned. Section 6.1.1.2 discussed why there may have appeared to be a lack of concern within the findings when the literature and the mapping study both indicated the changes should trouble single homeless women.

Again the 'poverty of expectation' can be felt around the issue of finances for the women; they accepted the changes as there was little they could do to change them. Instead they would try and manage their lives within the new parameters defined by the state. Chapter 4 showed sanctions were of particular concern to professionals working with services as they left women without any recourse to funds and therefore unable to access any accommodation support from services. For the same reason delays in receiving benefits, particularly in the context of the move to Universal Credit, were highlighted as a concern for all homeless people. The literature also demonstrated changes to local housing allowance were also an issue with housing benefit recipients being priced out of the local rental market. This thesis has established homeless women's dependence on others, friends, family and frequently men. This dependence is a very real concern for women in the context of current and planned political and structural changes. Dependency became a recurring theme throughout this thesis and in the single homeless women's homeless journey and attempts to exit homelessness.

6.1.3.1 Dependence

The first thing to highlight is that all of the women included in this thesis were reliant on state benefits to fund their housing and lifestyles. Although paid work was discussed by some of the women as a future aim, at the time of the narrative data collection none of them were in paid employment. It was seen as something that would happen for them once their housing and other difficulties discussed were resolved. Additionally, the residential services included in this study spoke of the challenges facing women using homeless services in getting a job,

expressing concerns that living in supported accommodation required high rents which unless subsidised by housing benefit were often too expensive for a service user to sustain (service 1).

All of the women participants had been reliant on state benefits prior to their use of homeless services. This is important when we consider the impact of the welfare reform. As shown in Chapter 2 the Welfare Reform Act 2012 and austerity measures leading to reductions in funding are impacting more negatively on those already struggling financially as they rely more substantially on benefits and support services. Research considering the impact on women of changes in the welfare system argued that women were disproportionately affected and that the amount women received through benefits had been reduced (Communities ASD, 2013). In this thesis services demonstrated genuine concern for their homeless service users when interviewed, highlighting three main issues – the impact of benefit sanctions, the 'bedroom tax' and changes to the local housing allowance (LHA). The women however pertained a slightly different attitude to their financial situation. The findings show that services were more concerned about welfare reform and the changes that were occurring at that time than the women themselves. The women talked less about the changes and seemed less aware of them, more worryingly they were perhaps more resigned to the fact that they were being hit with sanctions and further difficulties at a difficult time in their lives.

Jackie, for example, stated that the changes to the welfare state including increased sanctions and a push for more people to search for employment and spend less time on benefits had not 'effected [her] yet'. During our interview though she did express some concerns as she was due to undergo her medical examination to ascertain whether she could continue to claim Employment Support Allowance (ESA), only available when a doctor has declared that you cannot work due to illness or disability. If she was no longer able to claim ESA she would have to claim Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) which means there would be more pressure on her to return to work. Jackie's health conditions combined with her precarious housing situation would make it very difficult to focus on job seeking, but housing conditions are not a criteria for not receiving JSA.

In her narrative Kelly spoke of her concerns about not being accepted for housing benefit as she didn't have a 'local connection'. A local connection is achieved through residing in the city for six months or more or having an immediate family member in the city. As she fled to the

city due to fear of abuse, these rules may not apply but it must be agreed by the local council. If they deny her right to reside within the city she would have to return unless she can pay for herself to stay; which she can't. Kelly was solely reliant on state benefits. The stress of waiting for the council to make the decision was effecting Kelly's mental health and she states that she thought she was 'having another stroke because of it all'.

Christine was also having problems claiming her benefits due to the upheaval in her housing situation. Important letters related to her health were being sent to her old address which she no longer had access too. Without them she was struggling to prove her identity to the job centre and there was therefore a delay in her benefits coming through. Without her benefits she had no income at all. Which meant no money for food, bills, day to day living and even travel to the job centre to discuss the problem or travel to the medical centre to resolve the problem.

6.1.3.2 No financial support

Service 7 stated *'how do you support somebody that has no finance whatsoever and they can't eat'.* Services struggle to support women to abstain from drugs and alcohol, focus on achieving qualifications or maintain relationships when the women's focus is on finding enough money to eat. Moreover dependant on the service their policies may dictate that they are not allowed. Accommodation services for example were not able to offer support to women without access to Housing Benefit as this is how the service was predominantly funded. To try and reduce the stress on women food parcels were offered by some of the services, and a referral to the local food bank by all of the services could be given. 'Emergency Use Only' was a study published in 2014 about the use of food banks within the UK. It indicated that the use of food banks was a 'last resort only' and that accepting help from the food bank was 'unnatural' or 'embarrassing' (Perry et al, 2014). However, services interviewed inferred that the use of food banks was frequent and commonplace for their service users. This suggests that the feelings referred to were not preventing the homeless individuals supported receiving the food parcels. Perhaps this is because of their already marginalised position within society creating disconnect with what other food bank users may be feeling. The frequent use of food banks does also highlight the fact that once a dependency on the state cannot be maintained use of charities and voluntary services becomes important. The person does not find themselves suddenly in a position to support themselves.

6.1.3.3 Lack of concern

Perry et al (2014) support the view presented by services that the new (at the time) sanction policy which has led to increased sanctions was creating more hardship for people and in turn increased use of food banks. Loopstra et al (2016) also found that 'sanctioning appears to be closely linked with rising need for emergency food assistance'. It seems strange then that for the women participants sanctions were not highlighted. Three of the women declared they had been sanctioned at some point but they spoke about other – to them – more important financial concerns in more depth. I can only assume that because they were not sanctioned at the time of the interview they were not able to reflect on the impact of this. Instead they are firefighting their current plight; a lifestyle that creates an inability to think of the future and to look forward and make plans. In this context the threat of the coming welfare reform could not be viewed in the same light as it was by the services and the professionals surrounding them who could see the threat of tightened access to finances that may also be reduced. The women may not identify this as more than just another hurdle they will jump when they have to.

Even with a lack of concern from the women themselves there is no denying the impact that a reduced or no financial income had or has on homeless women, both in maintaining their homelessness and their inability to exit dangerous situations in an attempt to avoid homelessness. Welfare reform has and will make their homeless journeys more difficult. To combat this services need to be in a position to offer solutions for individuals so that they can focus on their transition out of homelessness rather than firefighting their immediate needs. Food banks are short term solutions to the problem of no food, but they do not provide the solution of no housing benefit. If a person cannot claim benefits – due to no recourse to public funds, no local connection or because of a sanction then under Universal Credit they will not be able to claim housing benefit. As identified in Chapter 4 accommodation services rely on housing benefit to be able to support and work with homeless individuals, without it they would not be able to run. Access to housing benefits or public funds then needs to be available at all times to ensure that the revolving door of homelessness does not continue. An understanding of the impact mental ill health and addiction may have on an individual's ability to remember and attend appointments and allowances or alternative 'punishments' need to

be granted. Without these changes to policy homeless services will always be limited in the support they can provide.

6.1.3.4 Consequences of political austerity

Since the research on which this thesis is based took place the consequences of political austerity have become more apparent with £40 million a year being cut from the welfare budget since 2010. The UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, Prof Philip Alston in 2018 stated that 'poverty [in the UK] is a political choice' (The Lancet Public Health, 2018). The political choices of austerity seem to exacerbate the pressures being faced by homeless people. FEANTSA (the European Federation of National Organisations Working with Homeless People) concludes that the economic decline experienced since 2010 and political austerity measures chosen to combat it, have resulted in increased poverty levels and 'social and housing exclusion' throughout Europe (FEANTSA, 2011). Section 2.6 of this thesis highlights widespread cuts in funding and reductions in staffing and services amidst increasing numbers of homeless people. The recently published review written by Michael Marmot entitled Health Equity in England: The Marmot Review 10 years on further establishes the huge impact austerity has had on public health and homelessness over the past decade.

'Ten years of austerity policies and rolling back the state have resulted in widespread reductions in public spending and intervention in almost all areas; and, at the same time, social, economic and regional inequalities have deepened.' (p11)

The report analyses health inequalities and social determinants of health in the last decade, since the initial Marmot review. It concludes that the impact of political austerity on health and equity has been 'significant' and has led to inequalities in life expectancy growing for women, particularly those living in more deprived areas where it had actually declined and that a higher number of men and women are spending more of their life in ill health since 2010. It again establishes poverty and deprivation as an important influence on health and mortality and demonstrates that reducing funding and cutting services has resulted in more profound inequalities in health across the country.

Specifically for those who are homeless the new Marmot review highlights the large increase in homelessness and rough sleeping between 2010 and 2017 - 165 percent – and talks about the impact of reduced funding, services and changes in policy. The report showed that policy allowing private landlords to evict tenants without reason and ban certain individuals, such as

those in receipt of housing benefit, from renting had led to four times the number of people being made homeless from the private rented sector between 2009/10 and 2016/17 (p114). As shown in Chapter 2 women are more likely to be in receipt of housing benefit than men, and are therefore more likely to be impacted by this ban. In addition Marmot explained that nearly one in five landlords would not rent to those families with children (p114), making it increasingly more difficult for homeless women to find properties to rent even when classed as single; as the importance of their identity as mothers, as discussed within this chapter, and desire to have a relationship with their children means any barriers to mothers are also barriers to them.

In addition to the whopping 165 percent increase the report acknowledges, that as previous research shared in Chapter 2 discusses, the 'real' number of those homeless is unknown due to hidden homelessness. Chapter 2 also demonstrates that women are more likely to remain hidden in the early stages of homelessness in an attempt to be safe and to protect and support children, at times this includes staying with abusive partners as heard in Lucy's story. All of the women whose narratives featured in this thesis had experienced abuse and the recently published Marmot review showed the impact of housing on women feeling they are able to flee this abuse, with 46 percent of women in London stating that the fear of leaving a secure tenancy meant they stayed in an abusive relationship (p115).

The review also considers the impact of austerity on rough sleeping or street homelessness showing that in 2018 there was a 22 percent increase in deaths in people rough sleeping in England and Wales with 726 in total (p115). The reason given for this is the reduction in spending on homeless services and huge cuts to funding to support vulnerable people with their housing, the latter representing a 59 percent cut between 2010 and 2018 (p117).

Section 2.6 of this thesis demonstrates losses of homeless services, staffing and reduced funding and the impact this has had on women who become homeless, the statistics gathered in this Marmot review support the fact that political austerity overwhelmingly impacts women, people who are considered to live in 'deprived' areas, homeless people and those who have experienced abuse. The impact therefore on single homeless women cannot be denied.

Without significant changes in policy and increased focus and funding for those living in poverty and marginalised in society it is unlikely that these findings will improve. The current global crisis being faced in COVID-19 means further economic downturn in the UK and could result in further cuts to funding and resources to support vulnerable people. Studies show that domestic abuse has increased since the onset of the pandemic with femicide numbers more than doubling (WBG, 2020). Without a change to housing legislation or increases in suitable service provision research showing the impact of political austerity so far would suggest that women will continue to see no other alternative than remaining in abusive relationships, meaning this number will continue to grow. In addition, emerging evidence suggests that women are being hit harder by the lockdown restrictions as they are more likely to work in sectors with high numbers of redundancies or furloughed employees, meaning wages reducing to 80 percent. In turn this is likely to increase dependence for women on benefits and those around them. With the knowledge that political austerity can and does shorten life for all but particularly for those who are already vulnerable, this new wave of political austerity must not be at the expense of single homeless women, poverty must not be a 'choice'.

6.1.3.5 Opportunity

'Welfare Reform' and political austerity could and should be a time for a change in the way homelessness is viewed and managed, there is an opportunity for new polices to acknowledge the pressures facing homeless men, women and services and to allow for services to do more. A move from individual blame to societal challenge would support this acknowledgement. In the words of Mahatma Ghandi 'A nation's greatness is measured by how it treats its weakest members', to offer a more restorative welfare system rather than a punitive one would demonstrate this ethos more fully. To ensure access to services, to provide services that are more suitable to their users and for services be responsive to change and the changing needs of those in society could mean that despite the difficult times being experienced conditions for homeless women do not have to become worse.

6.1.4 Section Summary

This section has demonstrated how and where the research on which this thesis is based has answered the research questions established in section 1.2 of this thesis. It brought together the views of services and single homeless women using them, highlighting the difference between them. Whilst acknowledging the difficulties facing services and their experiences. The

findings question the methods applied to working with women and the areas of focus for services. It raises concerns for how homeless women are marginalised further by recent wider reaching structural changes likely to affect women beyond the city in which this study is based.

Firstly, the way in which women identify themselves is different to how services categorise and identify them, and perhaps how they have been identified in this study. Whether this be for practical reasons (eligibility), or a view built on experience the inconsistency creates problems when trying to design support structures to be effective. A similar discrepancy was found in the discussion of the theme of relationships, with women keen to express their desire to work with services and receive support and services expressing their concern about a lack of engagement from homeless women. The discussion continued to address barriers facing women in service engagement and how women could be included within service design considering both the individual and structural areas of concern. The section went on to explore the key theme of 'finances' demonstrating how set changes to the welfare system and structural systems not only add to the pressures and complexities of single homeless women's experiences of services but also to the services ability to work with and include all single homeless women and how a wider understanding of homeless women needs to be achieved if they are to be supported successfully.

This thesis has established that women are viewed as 'different' to their male counterparts by the staff in the services spoken to but are worked with in the same way. The section has shown that for women to be supported appropriately then the support they are offered needs to be specific to and for women. Furthermore it has established that the issue of gender itself does impact on how single women experience homelessness, as gender can be defined as the social and cultural differences between men and women there are important implications for professionals working with homeless women and for homeless policy. These implications will be considered later on in the chapter.

6.2 Contribution to knowledge

The way in which this thesis contributes to knowledge is through the methodology it has used, its timing, researcher positionality and empirical findings. Barriers to women using services have been identified and explored in terms of the complexity of women's homelessness, services lack of experience and focus on women, societal perception of female homelessness,

changes in state levelled support, single homeless women's own poverty of expectations and a lack of service design and delivery influenced by gender. Efforts were made throughout to be as inclusive as possible and therefore the only restriction on the age of women was to be classed legally as an adult and despite focusing on single homeless women overwhelmingly the participants were mothers meaning parenting and family issues of homelessness have been considered.

One of the most significant contributions to knowledge is the uniqueness of the methods used to conduct this research. The methods have allowed the study to advance methodological techniques of doing research with homeless women, creating a design that resulted in in depth findings beyond the words of the women. By analysing their stories, views and experiences were apparent that women had not explicitly expressed; in a questionnaire women may have answered positively about their use of the service they were in, this thesis has enabled their positive rhetoric to be contextualised by the circumstances within their own lives, within the city they live, by the service they are using and by the wider national political climate. The depth of the findings uncovered within this thesis created through a triangulation of service inquiry, single female homelessness exploration and a review of the literature combined with the specific three stage method allows it contribute further to knowledge.

The research on which this thesis is based included eight single homeless women due to the volume of data it produced and depth of understanding achieved. Chapter 2 described how much of homelessness investigation is completed through either quantitative research – homelessness statistics – or considers a larger number of participants, meaning that their findings are more general and lose the insight achieved within this thesis.

Narrative methodology was chosen as it allowed me to collaborate with professionals working in homeless services and single homeless women rather than 'do research on them', after all I had previously been one of them. Building a narrative afforded the 'story teller' an opportunity to express their experiences as well as their feelings in their own words, giving me an opportunity to acquire further data about their lived experiences and social or cultural positions that may well have been missed by quantitative methods. It gave further insight to help me understand what it was like to be working in homeless services during that current economic crisis or to be single and female and homeless, furthermore, it gave an opportunity

to empower the female participants so important to me when I set out to complete the research on which this thesis is based.

I knew that I could not ignore my influence on the research and its findings and that as a previous practitioner co-constructing narratives with other practitioners and single homeless women my role was as important to the research design as the participants'. The inclusion of reflexive accounts allowed for my experience in conducting the research and viewpoint as an ex-practitioner to be heard and to frame the narratives included in this thesis. It also allowed this thesis to contribute further to the knowledge of the insider/outsider role by increasing understanding of impacts on both participants and researchers and offers insight into how this may be managed in future research. I also used my practitioner knowledge and experience to help formulate the research design, considering how as participants they may want to be included and feel comfortable.

Professionals working within homeless services were initially spoken with to provide context to the women's narratives, existing policy and practice. Research into homeless services and their role in supporting homeless women out of homelessness is limited within literature, as reported in Chapter 2. The mapping study therefore contributed to the knowledge on female homelessness from this perspective alone. I knew that the views of services regarding homeless women would clearly impact how women experienced those services, but the narratives of professionals working in those services also offered an insight into the current homeless provision and opportunities for single homeless women. This thesis has compared and contrasted this knowledge with the narratives of single homeless females offering a distinctive perspective of the single homeless woman's experience of homelessness. The powerlessness or concern professionals felt over the housing situation at that time and recent changes to homeless services, proved to be important in understanding the holistic experience of single homeless women. This perspective is often missed in wider homelessness literature. To be able to compare and contrast the views allowed for a deeper understanding and more insightful implications for practice to be discussed in section 6.5.

Creative methods were used in co-construction of narratives with single homeless women. Creating timelines allowed for a visual and tangible element that gave women something to focus on whilst they were talking and for them to witness their role in creating those

narratives, helping to empower them through research. This allowed for the experience to feel less intense, as women did not have to look at me, and gave an opportunity for collaborative working, extending discussions around a certain time or place. It also allowed for some order to be given to the stories women shared. As the women's narratives have shown in Chapter 5 their experiences have at times been complex, the visual nature of the timeline aided memory of the different services they had used and allowed for collection of the life trajectory of women. The chronology of services used later showed to be important in demonstrating the importance of a single homeless women's first contact with support agencies. Placing the timelines on the floor between myself and the women also acted as a 'balancer', enabling me to begin to build a relationship with the participants so important when gathering such personal data.

The research methods were sensitive and flexible making them appropriate for use within the homeless population. The three step design allowed for enough information collected at the first stage to prove useful for the inquiry, the next two steps however offered greater detail and input by the single homeless women, empowering them in their involvement and protecting them and their stories to a greater degree. Ensuring the women were happy and comfortable with their participation was an important part of the research design. Previous experience of working with the homeless population supported the research design process and the researcher positionality central to this inquiry and the influence that created on the method, findings and analysis has been observed throughout this thesis.

Overall, the triangulation and use of methods has not only ensured a depth of understanding greater than that acquired as a practitioner, by services or within a review of the literature it has also allowed women some control over their narrative and contribution to the research and policy. The methods have revealed the previously hidden voices of an often stigmatised and marginalised group adding to the knowledge on single homeless women's experiences of homeless services and highlighting the importance of gender as a structuring category. Chapter 2 demonstrated insufficient research on how gender influences the design of homeless services. The thesis has offered a gendered perspective to homelessness so missing in the literature and claims that allowing gender to influence service design is vital to creating a service provision that works.

The thesis also establishes the complexities of the notion of a 'single homeless female'. It begins to unpick the concept of 'single'. The definition of single used within this thesis was derived from policy; which omits mothers whom are estranged from, whom have lost or who have adult children. Many of the women included within the research who were determined by policy and homeless services to be single, had partners or children. Motherhood was key to women's identity and future hopes and aspirations, therefore key to women's needs. Policy does not allow for single women who are mothers or the impact that this has on their identity and therefore does not allow for homeless services to incorporate support for 'mothers' perhaps imperative in a sustainable route out of homelessness.

Furthermore, what is meant by 'homeless' by those experiencing homelessness is questioned. Again discrepancies between the definitions in policy and used by homeless services and the way in which women identified themselves were great; creating a challenge to the way in which women were categorised and a void in the time between finding themselves homeless and reaching out for or receiving support. The impact of the experiences of women within this void was often to create multiple exclusion for women, in turn requiring more time and support to disentangle.

The knowledge gained here about women's identity adds to existing literature surrounding homelessness and identity that suggests its importance in individuals exiting homelessness and sustaining reintegration within society. In turn it adds to the knowledge of the importance of how women are viewed within society when they are marginalised. Evidence such as this is imperative in better understanding single homeless women and how they can be supported to exit homelessness. In addition however where other research on homeless identity has not considered its importance in relation to the use of services, this thesis does.

A further way in which this research contributes to knowledge is through its timing. The changes illustrated in this thesis such as the reduction in services, changes to their structure and the national welfare reform are recent and therefore little is known about their effects on single homeless women. This research is a timely exploration of some of these affects and contributes to knowledge on the pressures facing both homeless women and services from a service user and professional working within homeless services perspective.

6.2.1 The journey from practitioner to researcher

The final contribution to knowledge this thesis offers is an insight into the experience of practitioners as researchers or insider/outsider research. This experience was made unique through my own practitioner experience, the timing of the research and the participants themselves but the lessons learnt could be used and transferred more widely to other practitioners attempting the same journey.

It is widely accepted and expected that a researchers view, stance or circumstance impacts qualitative research through its design, its analysis and its results, particularly in feminist literature, but I think that although I acknowledged that I would have an impact on the research early on, I had not quite understood how huge this impact may be nor the impact of the research on me personally (Bishop and Shepherd, 2011, Armstead, 1995 and Letherby, 2003). .

The reflexive text boxes throughout this thesis demonstrate how my view has been changed throughout this personal journey to recognise the academic and the practitioner and where and how the two roles work both separately and in unison. The requirement to be able to communicate with people and build a relationship is one that I would have previously associated with front line working with clients, and although perhaps I could still concede it is more crucial in this role, I would also argue this is only because the relationship built tends to be ever changing and longer term. As a researcher, I have learnt that the relationship with participants is key to the information you gain and should be an area addressed with much care, thought and dedicated to with time.

I have also learnt that although a journey can have the same destination, different methods can produce different perspectives. At the start of this research I was convinced that I needed to help and support any female homeless participants 'in the moment' and I should be prepared for this, through applying different interviewing techniques than those used when working as a support worker. Spending time with the women in a different role I learnt that this would not be appropriate. Allowing a person the space and freedom to tell their story without offering up comments or suggestions can in itself be a powerful experience and should be one that is afforded to participants and clients without the promise or pressure of retribution.

Occupying the two roles I did can be a challenge and a blessing. During the data collection stages the innate instincts developed over the years of working with the homeless population were used constantly and combined with my knowledge of safeguarding allowed for the safety of the participants and myself to be paramount. There were several incidences when the interviews were limited or conversation direction was changed to protect the vulnerable participant which derived from my ability as a practitioner to anticipate an individual's mood or potential repercussion's. Although this may be seen as a positive by me as a practitioner and I can feel satisfied that I acted ethically, as a researcher this can present the challenge of ensuring the data remains unaffected and that vital details have not been missed. It is here again that I would advocate for the building of a relationship with research participants so that these concerns can be discussed and/or addressed rather than avoided or missed.

My journey from practitioner has not resulted in me being one or the other, rather it has led to me now feeling like I occupy two roles, both with individual skills and merits. It has changed my perception that one is more valuable than the other – a view that has switched repeatedly throughout this journey, instead it has helped me to appreciate them both. Being a practitioner is still the role I relish, working with individuals, seeing and facilitating change, but being a researcher has helped me to broaden my knowledge and see 'a bigger picture', which I believe helps to make me better equipped in truly making a difference, which for me is what it has all been about.

6.3 Location of research within the wider literature

Using a combination of semi-structured interviews and creative methods to build timelines of single homeless women's experiences this thesis has captured the experiences and needs of these women living in one city during a time of major structural and political change. Chapter 2 addressed the existing literature surrounding the research questions and demonstrates that, although a real and growing concern female homelessness is still an area that is under researched. Many studies focus on specific areas affecting women who are homeless, many of which were identified in this thesis such as domestic abuse, mental health and substance misuse, but there are limited studies focusing on women's use of homeless services. Investigations into the use of services are frequently part of larger, often quantitative studies, meaning the voices of those participants are not always heard and 'in-depth examination of the homeless experience for women' cannot be fully understood (Tomas and Dittmar, 1995).

The thesis has bridged the gap and explored through detailed qualitative research using narrative methodology, the experiences of single homeless women using services.

Also limited; is the academic literature relating to the impact of the political changes and welfare reform occurring during the period of this research on single homeless women. In addition the impact this has on their use of services. The findings reported in this thesis explore the way in which the changes employed at a structural level and the political environment in which single homeless women live effect their homeless journeys and their ability to exit homelessness. In addition to women's narratives it has used comparisons with the views of professionals working in homeless services to determine a comprehensive explanation, allowing this research to contribute to contemporary debates surrounding female homelessness. Furthermore, the significant contribution of the research reported here is to offer real insight into how services can effectively support the needs of women during this time.

This thesis aimed to determine the importance of gender in service design and delivery. Chapter 4 exhibits the findings from the mapping exercise completed with professionals representing services referred to above. This, combined with women's narratives and a review of the literature highlighted the importance of women's experiences and the disparity between women's views and those of the practitioners working with them. This research not only helps to close the gap between professional thinking and service user views but also adds important alternative viewpoints to the literature available to practitioners and researchers working in this field.

6.4 System Map

To better make sense of the findings presented in this thesis I have included here a visual representation of the empirical themes and how they have then been deciphered in the form of a systems map. It is difficult to separate these themes as they all impact and influence on each other, therefore further arrows have been used to show where and which themes interact with each other in the women's lives. The visual representation further demonstrates how complex the women's lives are and how many competing and intertwining challenges they face.

The maps take inspiration from the larger and more detailed systems maps used in the Foresight Tackling Obesities: Future Choices project aiming to 'produce a long term vision of how we can deliver a sustainable response to obesity in the UK over the next 40 years' (Vandenbroeck et al, 2007). The project developed a causal loop model in an attempt to better understand the complex systemic nature of obesity hopeful that this would aid policy makers in their response to the issue, describing a system as 'a structured set of objects and/or attributes together with the relationships between them' (1: Vandenbroeck et al, 2007). The findings presented also demonstrate a set of attributes all of which have a relationship and therefore a similar approach can been used in this thesis to better understand the complex nature of women's homeless experiences.

The system map below shows firstly the woman at the centre of the diagram. Next empirical themes are displayed in boxes closest to the woman and finally the breakdown of those empirical themes as discussed in Chapter 6 are shown in further boxes. Arrows have then been used to show the relationship and causal effect between each theme – which could be referred to as in the original systems map as variables. Unlike in the original systems map however all the effects demonstrated by the arrow is not one way, the causal effect between many of the themes is two way, depicted by the arrow tip at each end and creating a 'feedback loop'. Where the arrow only has one end the causal effect is only felt one way. Blue arrows show the effect between similar themes and red arrows across themes. Black arrows are used only to show the breakdown of the empirical theme. There are of course many links that may have been missed in this diagram but the arrows show the main causal effects found in this investigation.

The causal effect between the themes can ultimately be increased and decreased dependant on whether another of them is taken as a negative or positive. For example the link between 'Availability of Services' and 'Opportunity'. If the availability of services were to increase so would opportunity and vice versa. The link between 'Availability of Services' and 'Dependence' [on men] – if the availability of services increased there would be less need for a dependence on men.

What the diagram shows is that the needs of women cannot be separated out. Any methods of working with women and policies and practice then should ensure they consider the complex

nature of the women's lives combined with the challenges they face within society. The next section of this chapter will address the implications for practice found in this research and make suggestions for how what has been demonstrated here can be achieved.

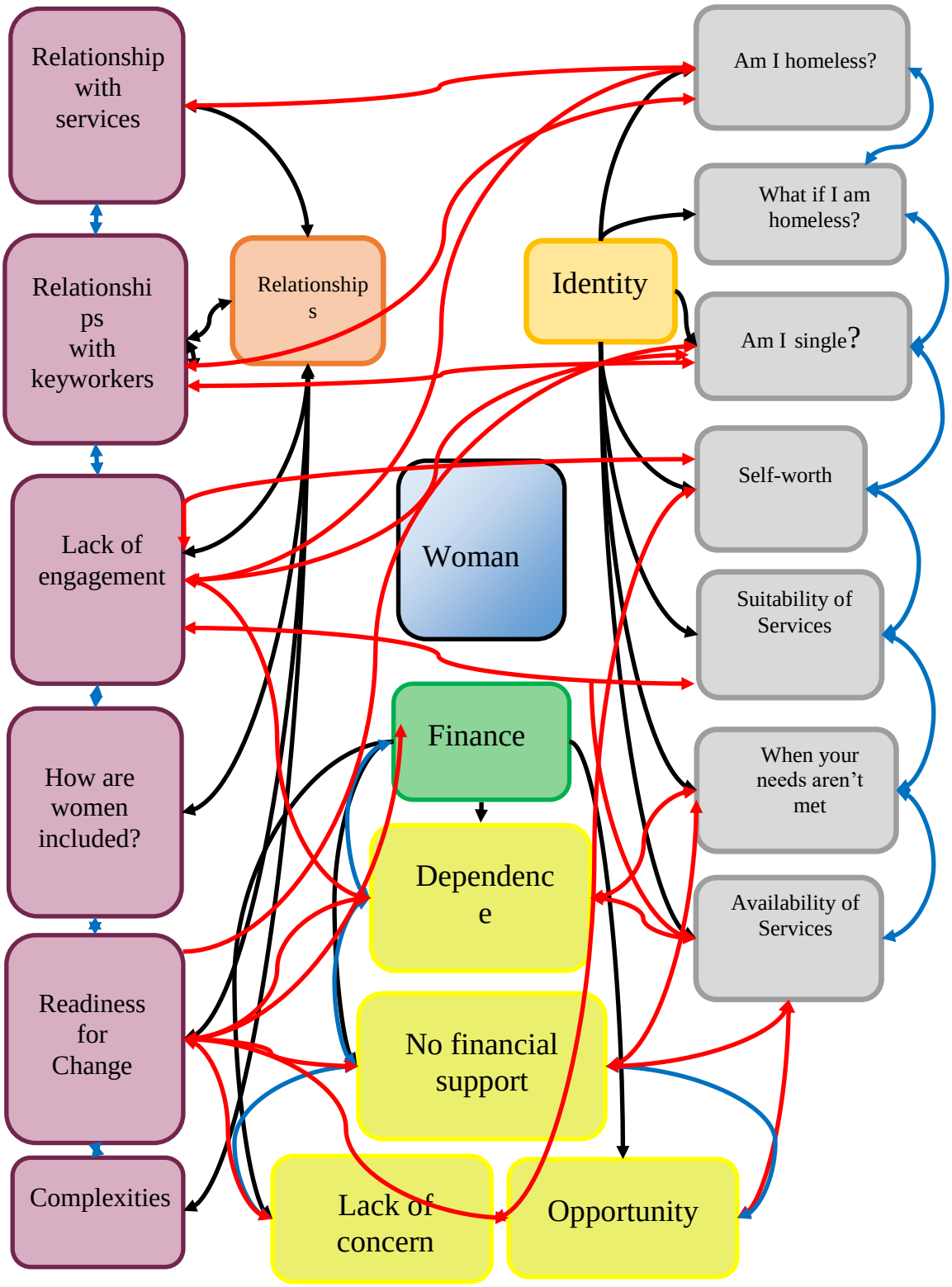

Figure 2. System Map of Empirical Themes – Author

6.5 Implications for Practice

The findings that have been uncovered in this thesis have illustrated several areas of importance for professionals working with homeless women. How society, services and practitioners view and approach women is significant if they are to build the relationships necessary to practically support women to exit homelessness.

6.5.1 Time

The relationship that women have with their keyworker was highlighted in Section 6.1.1.3.2 as crucial to women's engagement with services. To aid this relationship professionals need to be able to have time to develop a connection with women that demonstrates their reliability, consistency and ability to support without judgement women who are homeless. Time in services is often limited, for example in one of the accommodation services residents had a short tenancy of three months at which time they were expected to have moved on or reason for their continued stay had to be presented to the local authority and an extension to their stay requested. In mental health services time spent with a service user may be limited to a number if appointments. Both of these examples show that women would be expecting the relationship built with the professional from that service to come to an end. An element of self-preservation should then be expected where women do not fully commit to the relationship. The findings suggest should the time allowed to work with women be extended then professionals would have the space and opportunity to concentrate on building a trusting relationship as well as on the practical issues that have led to homelessness ensuring increased engagement and a better chance for a positive outcome.

6.5.2 Complexity

Further consideration should be given to how female homelessness is understood as a whole. The research has demonstrated that homelessness in women is complex and multi-faceted. Joint up and partnership working between services and specialists to ensure all areas of concern can be addressed is therefore imperative if women are to successfully navigate homelessness. A system set up for joint working with all women should be the norm. Much like the social care system for looked after children or child protection where there are regular meetings between all professionals and a joint support plan and paper trail, a system that insists all professionals involved with supporting a homeless woman work together should not just be best practice.

Within the statutory services of the NHS and Social Care partnership working is outlined in The Health and Social Care Act of 2012 and The Care Act of 2014, amongst others, and a duty to guarantee integrated care is placed upon them. The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 starts to address this issue and refers to the importance of agencies and the housing authority working together to support individuals. In addition public bodies such as prisons, the jobcentre and statutory services are now compelled to inform housing services if they are concerned somebody is homeless or threatened with homelessness. Although this starts to develop communication between services and create links, the Act does not make long term partnership working compulsory for agencies as many of the services working with homeless people are from the voluntary sector. Partnership working would allow for services to be aware of the variety of problems facing homeless women at any one time and to create a plan for ongoing support ensuring that each area is being addressed. Any challenges that may appear once support starts may also be more easily overcome.

Until a compulsory need to work together is recognised workers should make every effort to build networks with local services working with homeless women and issues around mental health, parenting and substance misuse, as well as housing. As standard women should be asked to agree to share information and be made aware that partnership working is the norm within these services so that they can be motivated to participate with the process as much as possible. Effort to meet regularly and set formats for contact between organisations should also be realised in order for information to be shared as easily as possible. Any concerns women have regarding joint working should be heard and addressed as early as possible so that partnership working remains for the benefit of the woman at all times.

The findings of this research echo much of the recommendations that have preceded it. Homeless Link state that good practice in supporting women who are homeless is to work in partnership to address the multiple support needs presented; 'women with multiple and complex needs often find it hard to access support from local services that may not be tailored to their needs. Building partnerships between services...can overcome this' (4: Homeless Link, 2017). They advocate different types of services working from one location so that women who are homeless can seek support for additional needs to housing in the same place at the same time and to ease sharing of information.

'The cost of tenancy failure' (2011) confirms that along with being associated with successful outcomes for women, partnership working is also cost effective in supporting individuals to maintain independent accommodation (Scottish Council Single Homeless, 2011). Similarly the Prison Reform Trust found that partnership working between statutory and third sector agencies is important in supporting women leaving prison (Prison Reform Trust, 2016).

6.5.3 Women as Mothers

The findings also highlighted an area currently overlooked by support for single homeless people. The majority of the women in this research identified as 'single' by services were mothers. Although they may currently find themselves estranged from their children, being a mother was an important part of their identity and reason for wanting to find safe and sustainable accommodation. As discussed in Section 6.1.1.1.3, working with women as single when they do not identify as single is futile. It does however raise the question of how women could be supported as mothers when they have no children residing with them. Local housing allowances only allow for single people to claim housing benefit for accommodation suitable for one person, this could be a room in a shared house, a bedsit or perhaps a one bedroom flat. If the person is under 35, it is a room in a shared house only. This makes it difficult to support an individual to find accommodation large enough and appropriate for a child to come and stay. However, smaller and simpler changes to the way practitioners work could still offer support.

Simply identifying a woman as a mother rather than single identifies the woman how she wishes and recognises her needs. Consideration to the location of any future housing, in terms of proximity to her children and ease of visitation and contact, should be made. Of course this may require partnership working with social care and family support organisations to ensure the safety and security of such considerations. Furthermore, working with women to build their own relationship with social care may enable a long term view to their current housing problem and reduce the likelihood of repeated homelessness.

6.5.4 Intergenerational homelessness

An alarming finding from the research is the amount of repeated homelessness experienced by the women. Seven of the eight women had previously been homeless. Many of them spoke

about earlier sofa surfing and staying with friends. For several of these women these experiences begin for them as children; running away from home or moving into refuges with their mother. The intergenerational impact of homelessness has been described as 'highly gendered' (28: Ribar, 2017). For the women included in this study the impact must be considered both 'on' them and 'by' them. As discussed above many of these women are mothers themselves. Their own homelessness therefore has had or could have an impact on their own children, but as stated here many of them experienced homelessness themselves at a young age, some at the hands of their own parents, creating an impact on them.

The impact of homelessness on children is well documented; effecting their ability to participate and contribute at school (Digby and Fu, 2017), resulting in poor health and wellbeing outcomes (Ribar, 2017) and hunger and poor nutrition, developmental delays and psychological problems apparent (Coufopoulos and Hackett, 2009). It has been argued that simply experiencing homelessness reduces an individual's likelihood of escaping it due to a person's capacity to adapt or get used to a culture (Johnson and Chamberlain 2008 cited in Ribar, 2017). The women's exposure to homelessness as children could start to explain their current housing situation and the air of acceptance felt by me in their narratives. Also it could begin to account for some of the additional issues relating to their homelessness and resulting in the women becoming a part of multiple-exclusion homelessness discussed in Section 6.1.2.4.

Often described as a revolving door of homelessness repeated episodes of homelessness are frequent when considering multiple-exclusion homelessness (MEH). As recommended above partnership working is paramount to address multiple-exclusion, but to reduce the impact of intergenerational homelessness professionals working with homeless women need to really understand the entrenched nature of this type of homelessness. Additional training surrounding women's homelessness and its impact is of course important for all women and will be discussed in more detail next, but to really reduce the revolving door of homelessness an element of 'through care' needs to be apparent.

The findings show the women's experiences of homeless services, and Chapter 4 shows the availability of services in one city at one time. There is no service that offers women support from finding themselves homeless, offering supported accommodation, finding sustainable

independent accommodation and support in maintaining it. Referring back to the importance of the relationship with professionals for a woman, through care would seem to offer women the required level of support. Through care is common in the criminal justice system with prisons offering a statutory duty for through care to certain offenders. It consists of providing a service whilst in prison, during their transition back into the community and for the remainder of their sentence (or if choosing voluntary through care for up to one year after release). Services should offer a similar process for homeless women which would see their relationships with keyworkers maintained and increase their likelihood of engagement. It would also increase professional's knowledge of the individual they're supporting enabling the appropriate support to be offered. A longer and closer working relationship means practitioners are more likely to be able to offer early intervention when challenges present themselves. With the extended support and guidance women may be given the opportunity to adapt to new cultures rather than return to those that have been familiar.

6.5.5 Including women in service design and delivery

My final recommendations for working with women, drawn from the research on which the thesis reports, are perhaps my most desired, and the most simple. Training. Inclusion.

The findings show that only two of the services at the time of the scoping exercise participated in training specific to the females they supported. The rest applied methods used to work with homeless males and applied them to women. As I have argued throughout these recommendations a deeper understanding of single women's homelessness needs to be achieved if they are to be supported in the right way and in the appropriate setting. Training would help practitioners to adapt their working methods when necessary and where appropriate. It would also allow services to support changes attempting to create a more woman friendly atmosphere.

There is no 'women's only' service for single homeless women in the city and there should be; for all the reasons presented in this thesis. If this cannot be achieved then those supporting women need to be aware of the challenges that women are presented with both in being homeless and being supported within a mixed gender environment. Women only spaces could be identified so that women could have a location they feel safe in. Professionals working with women should be of the same gender where possible. Furthermore, services should include

women in its design and delivery. Perhaps as explored in Section 6.1.2.2 this could be through the application of the principle of co-production.

6.6 My ideal service

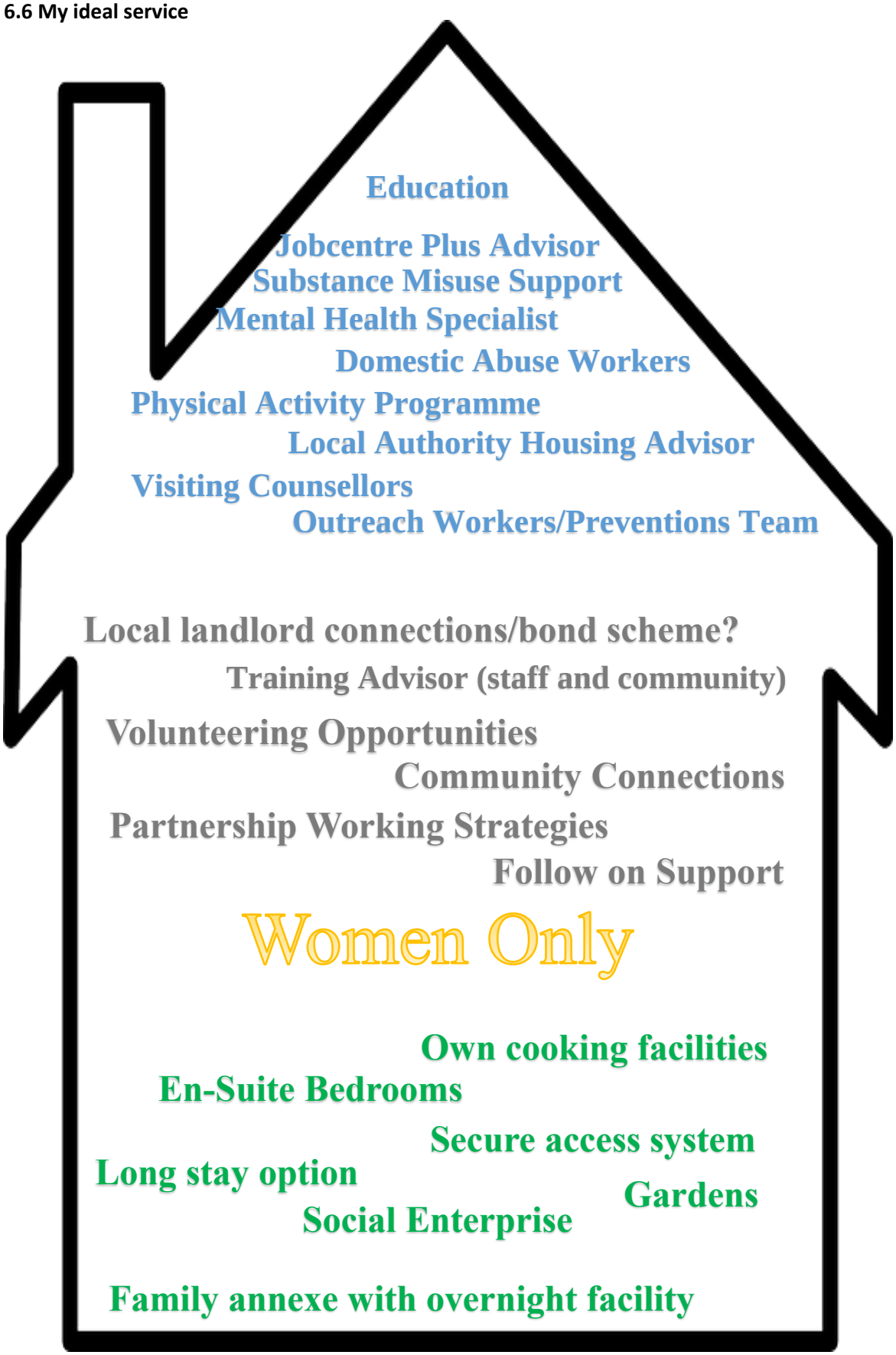

Figure 3. Ideal Service Visual Graphic - Author

The graphic above shows the most important things a service should include. Those in blue are the practitioners and staffing elements of the service, those in grey are those that reach out beyond the structure of the service itself and those in green are related to the design of the building itself.

An ideal service is hard to define but drawing the findings together a range of recommendations that could underpin an ideal service include at least the following:

- A women's only service.
- There is an outreach and early preventions team as part of the service.
- Key support agencies are also based at the service – jobcentre plus, substance misuse, mental health specialists, domestic abuse workers and education providers. Early interaction with these services is encouraged and is part of the support plans for the women.
- A clear and sustained partnership working process is in place.
- It provides training to local services on the issues it faces so that all agencies working together have a shared understanding.
- Follow on support for women once they leave the service.
- A service that is imbedded in its community, it knows what is happening in the area that is based. The community connections allow good links with local landlords and services so that these can be used on a regular basis.
- It is welcoming, it looks more like a home than an office.
- Each woman has their own room and own space with cooking facilities and the ability to be independent. Women are included in the maintenance of communal areas as part of their residence so they take pride in their surroundings.
- A family annexe is provided with its own separate entrance so family members can visit when appropriate and contact can be arranged with children. Overnight facilities are provided but closely managed.
- The service is secure so that women can feel safe.
- A regular physical activity programme is in place with links to local providers also.
- There are gardens to encourage being outside and women maintain them.
- Good connections with local volunteering agencies as well as opportunities to volunteer so women can gain confidence and experience are in place.
- The service may provide a bond scheme to support women into suitable accommodation.

- The service may run its own social enterprise with women working within it.

6.7 Areas for future research

In beginning to address how single women experience homeless services, whether gender is considered within service design and delivery and how women are impacted by current social and structural changes this research has led to further questions and areas of research.

The first comes from my position as a researcher and ex practitioner. The influence of my previous occupation has been considered throughout this thesis and there is no doubt that it has impacted the findings of this research. Further research to understand how much being an 'insider' on the 'outside' affects the outcome of such investigations would assist in developing our understanding of environmental influences and support research where the researcher is known to the community.

Other methodologies such as Participatory Action Research (PAR) and Phenomenology are both qualitative methods that would prove useful when researching this sector of society. Although discounted for this thesis PAR would be an interesting and empowering route for homeless women and may help to combat some of the participation issues found within this study as women could feel more invested in it. Both methods of research would need careful ethical considerations due to the unpredictable nature of homelessness and considering some of the ethical issues raised here in this study; observations for example could cause conflict when applied to vulnerable people under the influence of substances.

An underestimated yet important impact on the findings within this research came from the completion of a scoping exercise with professionals from services working with homeless women. In fact one of the biggest strengths of the research I believe is in the data collection not only from women but from professionals working within services. Speaking to both services and to the women using them allowed this research to compare their perspectives and gain additional insight into the female homeless experience in this City, particularly when contextualised by the unique timing of the research. The mapping study, although originally a short scoping exercise, proved valuable in understanding more about the women's current options and the perceptions of female homelessness – and therefore the situation they faced – at this time. Furthermore, findings suggest varying viewpoints between practitioners and the

women themselves; this is important when considered with the evidence presented here for the importance of women's identity and relationships. Further research looking at the disparity between professional and personal agendas within homelessness would reveal where and how the two can come together making services more efficient and effective. It is also important in making operational recommendations for policy and practice. In addition future research into female homelessness would benefit from being able to address both agendas when attempting to understand the findings from the women themselves.

For further exploration of female homelessness investigation of women not using 'homeless' services would be beneficial to understanding single females experiencing homelessness. An attempt has been made within this thesis, however a study that excludes homeless services could answer whether women are willing to use those services more easily than those indicated for homeless people, and if so why this is the case. A greater focus on those women who may be more 'hidden' would also be useful in ascertaining why women may not be accessing services and how these issues can be resolved. Ultimately both areas of research would also give us a greater understanding of women's homeless overall.

There is also an opportunity for further research to study the impact of researching women as 'single' when, as found within this research, they are not. How much does this label impact on women, particularly mothers estranged from their children. Related to this how is housing women who are not single as single women affecting these women's lives? In doing so are researchers, services and society reducing women's self-worth, if so what does this mean for women? This area would benefit from further research, in terms of how women who are regarded as mothers even though their children may not be living with them navigate similar situations, and whether this can be used to support women who have been through the trauma of being separated from a child.

The final area of further research is that of co-production. The importance of co-production is argued in Section 6.1.2.2 which demonstrates how it could assist services in developing provision for single homeless women that reflects and meets their needs. Further exploration of co-production and its use within homeless services would enable agencies to better understand its purpose, benefits and the methods used so they can be introduced more widely.

6.8 Some concluding remarks

This thesis has addressed the research questions it set out to answer, it has made several contributions to knowledge as described above and identifies a number of areas suitable for future research. Throughout this thesis I have been mindful to ensure the women's voices have remained central to the findings in keeping with the methodological approach and my own values. The findings presented demonstrate just how essential it is to listen to those with inside knowledge and to provide them with a platform in which to share their experiences if we are to learn the best way to support them. To conclude this thesis I share my recent thoughts on my personal experience of conducting this research, to demonstrate the life changing journey this thesis has taken me on:

Undertaking this doctoral research has been a life changing experience for me I have learnt much about myself and the world in which I inhabited as a professional for so long. I now look at things very differently than I did when I began, and I now can see myself as both a practitioner and academic.

I recognise that since this research began I have been able to acquire and foster new and old skills that I have used and will continue to take with me into practice. Despite being prepared for stories of trauma and distress I found I was moved more than I thought I would be when the women shared their stories, I felt an immense amount of privilege, as well as frustration at my inability to provide any immediate answers. The research journey followed me through all my major life moments - getting married, pregnancy, motherhood, bereavement, redundancy and purchasing a home. As I travelled my own journey I was completely absorbed in theirs. At times this left me exhausted and bereft and at others elated and determined.

Completing the writing of this thesis I cannot help but consider where these women are now, where they may be living and how they are supported. I realise I owe them an awful lot for giving me the opportunity and honour to hear and tell their stories. They have taught me so much through their experiences, through their continued hope and perseverance and I hope the ordering of their story helped in some way to make sense of their experiences and being a part of this research helped to make them feel heard.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Women's experiences of homelessness

Content removed on data protection grounds

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Appendix 2

Informed Consent Form Template

This research study aims to gain a deeper insight into the experiences of women using homeless services. I would like to talk to you as a woman who has this experience to discover how you have used them, what your experiences have been, what has affected this experience and what you would like from services in the future.

	Please tick
1. I confirm that I have read and understood the participant information sheet produced on the 26/06/2014 for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.	☐
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at anytime without giving a reason.	☐
3. I understand that all the information I provide will be treated in confidence	☐
4. I understand that I also have the right to change my mind about participating in the study for a short period after the study has concluded.	☐
5. I agree to be recorded as part of the research project	☐
6. I agree to take part in the research project	☐

Name of participant: .....

Signature of participant: .....

Date: .....

Witnessed by (if appropriate): .....

Name of witness:.....

Signature of witness:.....

Name of Researcher:.....

Signature of researcher: .....

Date:.....

Appendix 3
Semi structured interview questions

1. How many women do you support at any one time/in a month (dependant on type of service)?

2. Has this increased in the last 3 years?

3. How do women access your service?

4. Who can refer women to your service?

5. Is your service targeted at women?

6. How does it vary to the service you provide to men?

7. How are you funded?

8. Is this likely to change?

9. Has your funding reduced?

10. How are you staffed – how many workers, Male/female (working with women), more/less staff than used to be

11. What barriers do you see for women accessing your service?

12. What do you see are the challenges for homeless women?

13. What other services do you work with?

14. What do you feel are the barriers and opportunities created through this joint working?

15. Has the recent welfare reform had an impact? How do you think it will impact in the future?

To add:

Is there a difference between female and male engagement with the service?

Appendix 4

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Volunteers Wanted

Often assumptions are made about people using services for the homeless, especially about the support and services they require. Doing research is a way of finding out what those people using them really think. It is important that support services have an understanding of the experiences of using these services for women so they can get it right for you.

Are you –
- Female
- Aged 18+
- Using services for the homeless

Do you –
- Want to contribute to greater understanding of using homeless

Would you –
- Share your knowledge?
- Share your views?
- Share your experiences?
- Give 3 hours of your

Appendix 5

LADIES COFFEE MORNING

Fancy a cake, cuppa and a chat?

Then please join Linda in the Cafe
on
THURSDAY 14TH AUGUST
12 til 3

Why? Well besides the FREE cake, I'll be telling people all about my research talking to women about their experiences of homeless services, so please come and find out more!

Content removed on data protection grounds

Appendix 6


Lucy
Born North England
Unsafe due to neighbours
Women's refuge due to domestic abuse
B & B homeless accommodation
LA property
Came to dty with son and daughter over concerns for their safety
Private tenancy
Had to leave town due to concerns and lived in another women's refuge
Sofa Surfing
Prison – crime to support drug and alcohol use
Women's refuge – evicted due to behaviour
Service 1
Breakdown in relationship with residents
Service 1 - domestic abuse when ex found out where she was
Hostel (no longer present when interviews commenced)
LA property – found with support of last used agency
Drug use – property taken over by drug users
Moved back to private tenancy despite safety concerns
Prison
Current Service 5
Service 4
Private tenancy with ex-partner, poor condition, domestic abuse
LA couldn't help due to debts arisen in last property rented
Private tenancy with ex-partner – domestic abuse